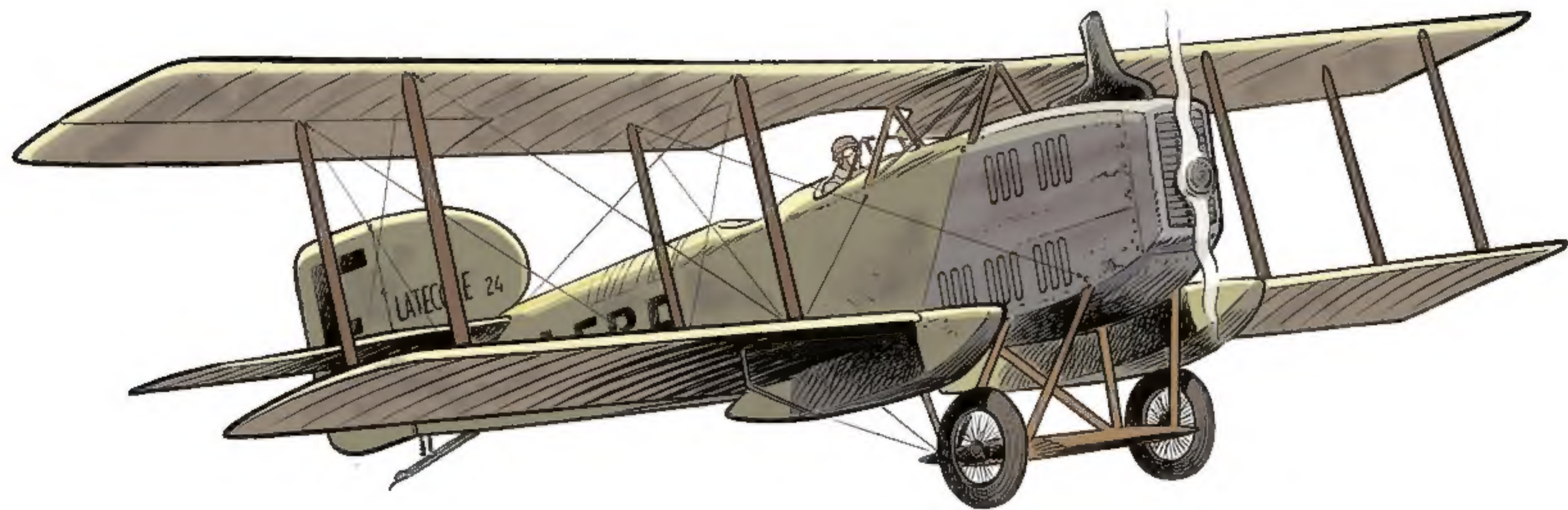


KRAEHN · MILLIEN

THE AVIATOR

3. Airmail to Africa





THE AVIATOR

3. Airmail to Africa

WRITER

JEAN-CHARLES KRAEHN

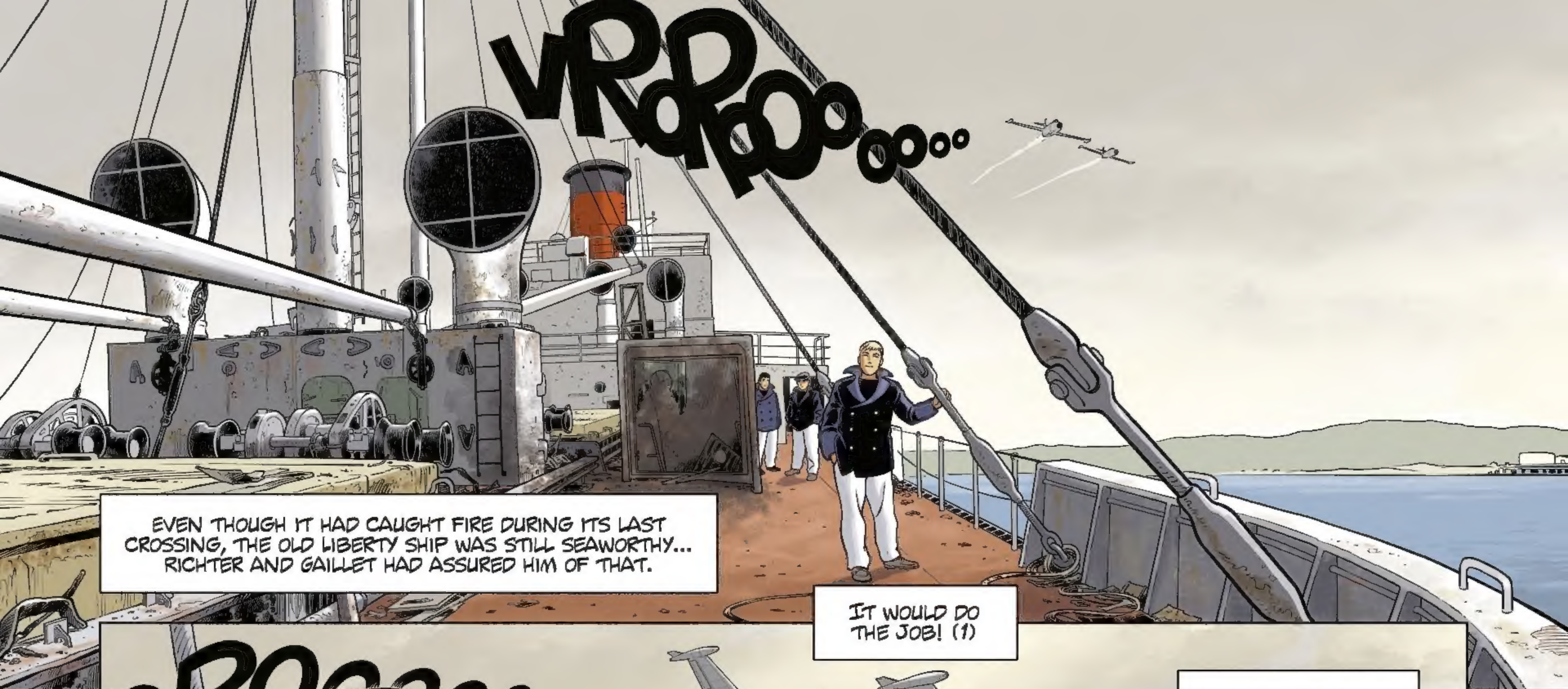
ARTIST

CHRYSS MILLIEN

COLORIST

PATRICIA JAMBERS

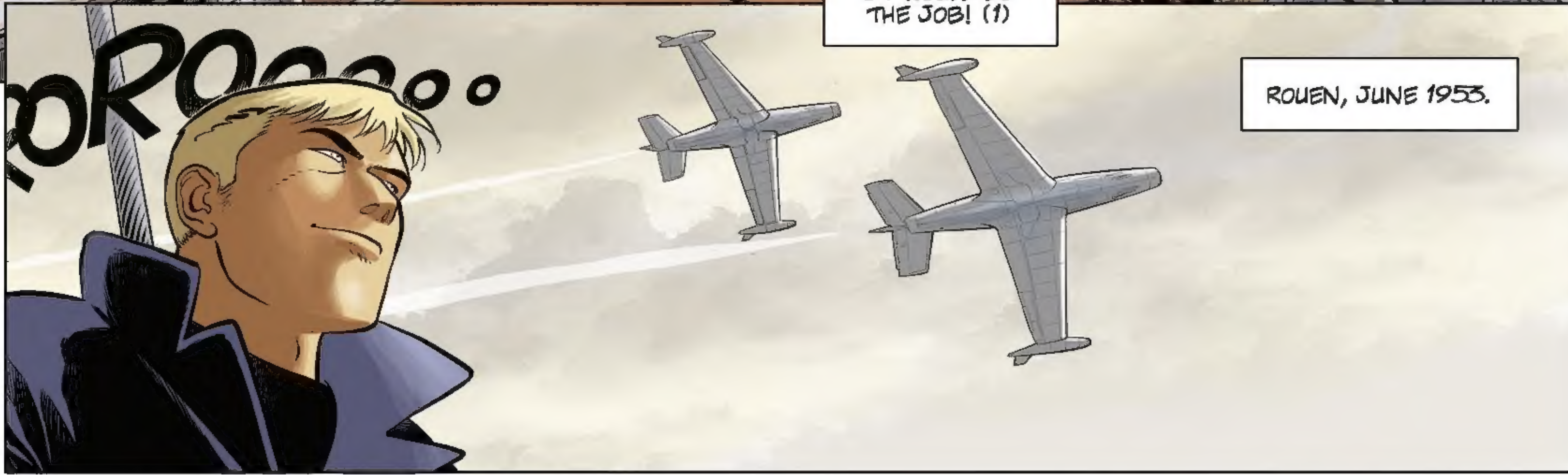




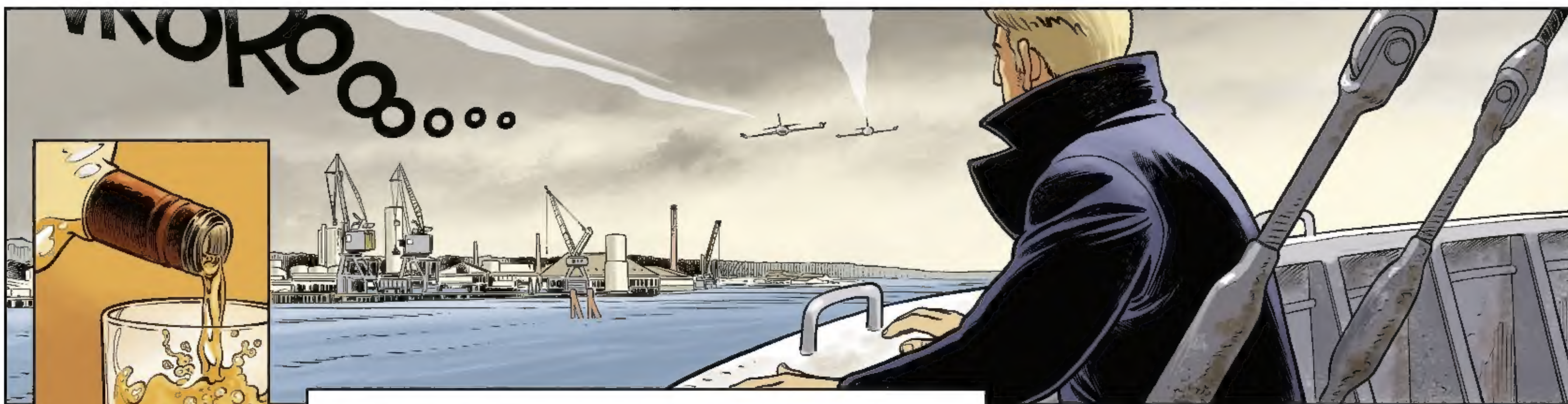
EVEN THOUGH IT HAD CAUGHT FIRE DURING ITS LAST CROSSING, THE OLD LIBERTY SHIP WAS STILL SEAWORTHY... RICHTER AND GAILLET HAD ASSURED HIM OF THAT.

IT WOULD DO THE JOB! (1)

ROUEN, JUNE 1953.



NOW THAT HE'D MADE HIS DECISION, YANN CALEC FELT SUDDENLY RELIEVED, AND HIS THOUGHTS FLEW WITH THE PLANES OVERHEAD-- BACK TO INDOCHINA. IT WAS THE GOLD HE'D BROUGHT BACK FROM TONKIN (2) THAT HAD ENABLED HIM TO BUY THIS SHIP...



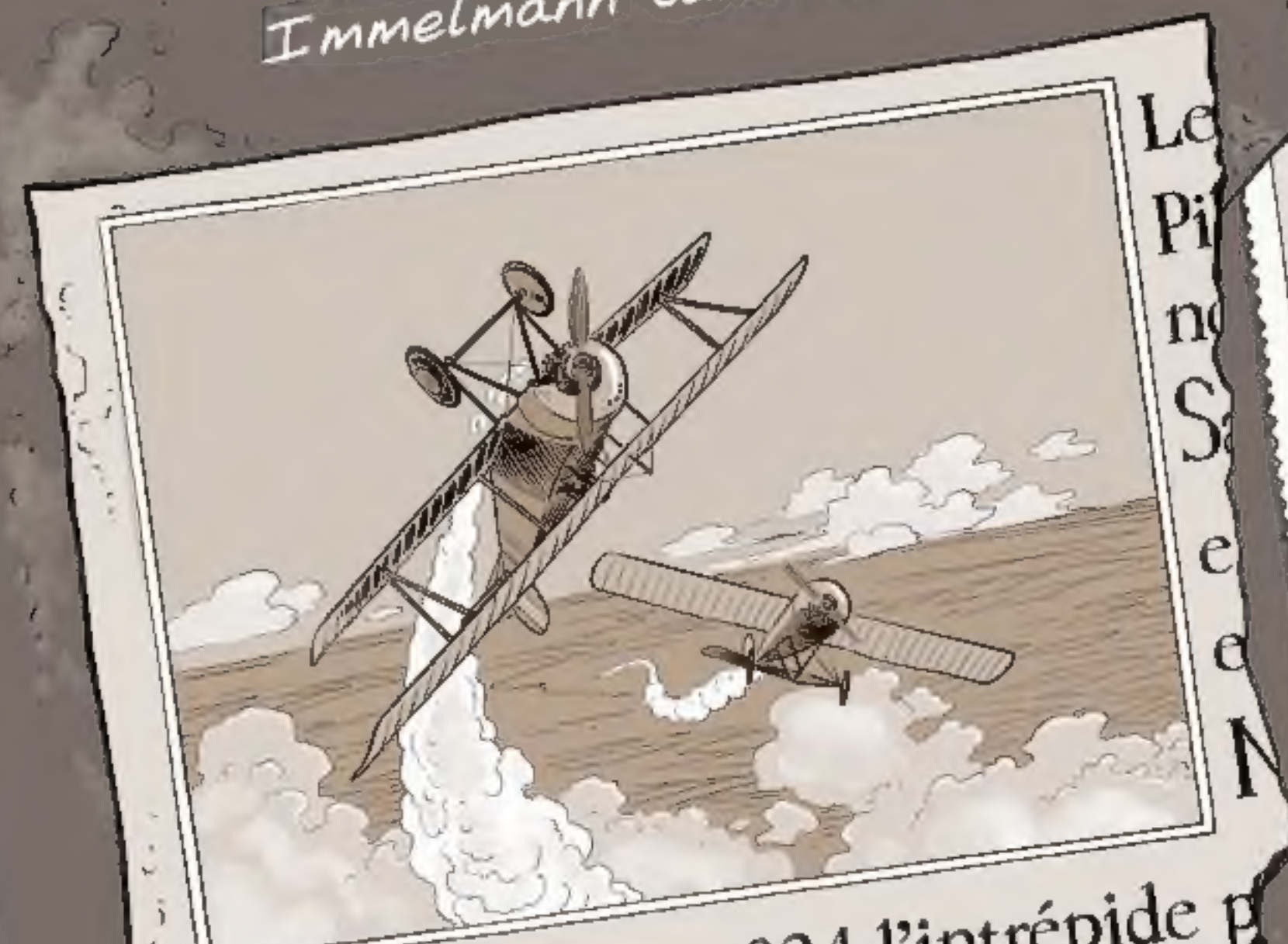
INDOCHINA... HIS FATHER... AND JOSEF SCHÄFER, NICKNAMED "HARD KNOCK" TANGUY, THE PILOT HE'D MET OUT THERE... YANN COULDN'T WAIT TO RE-OPEN HIS DIARY AND READ MORE ABOUT HIS DRAMATIC LIFE...



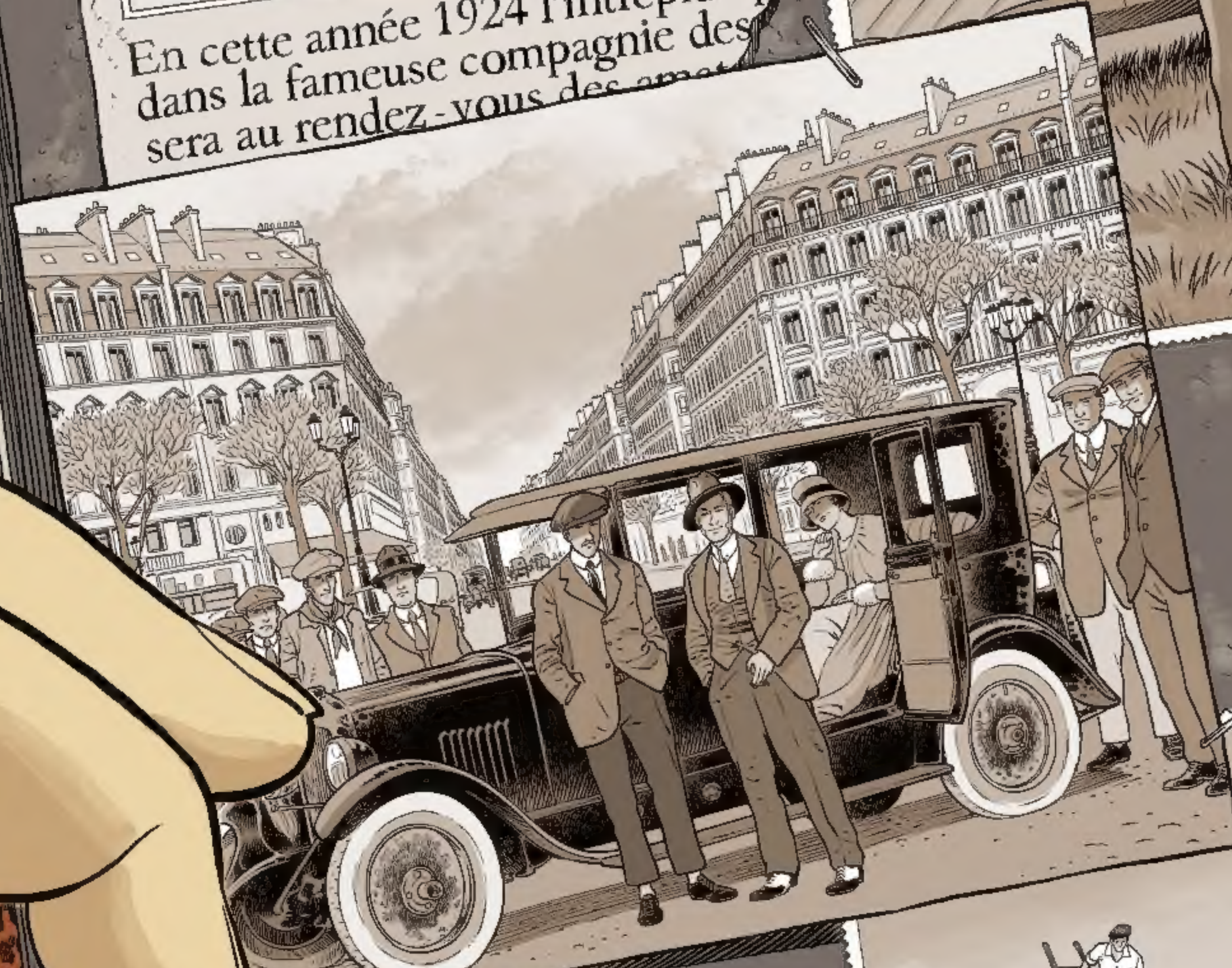
(1) SEE VOLUME 10 OF THE TRAMP SERIES, "THE CURSED FREIGHTER."
(2) SEE TRAMP VOLUME 9, "THE TREASURE OF TONKIN."

AIRMAIL TO AFRICA 1924 - 1926

Another perfect Immelmann turn. (1)



En cette année 1924 l'intrépide p dans la fameuse compagnie des sera au rendez-vous des am



So I continued working on the farm with Adèle, which gave her great delight but caused me intense frustration. We were still happy together, but I was young and dissatisfied...

My instructor told me I had a gift for flying and was sorry I wouldn't be able to continue my aerobatics training. He wasn't the only one! But sadly, I'd already used up all my savings.



My brother Moses, who was rapidly making a name for himself in the Paris underworld, had invited me to restart our profitable drug-flying business (2), but I'd categorically refused.



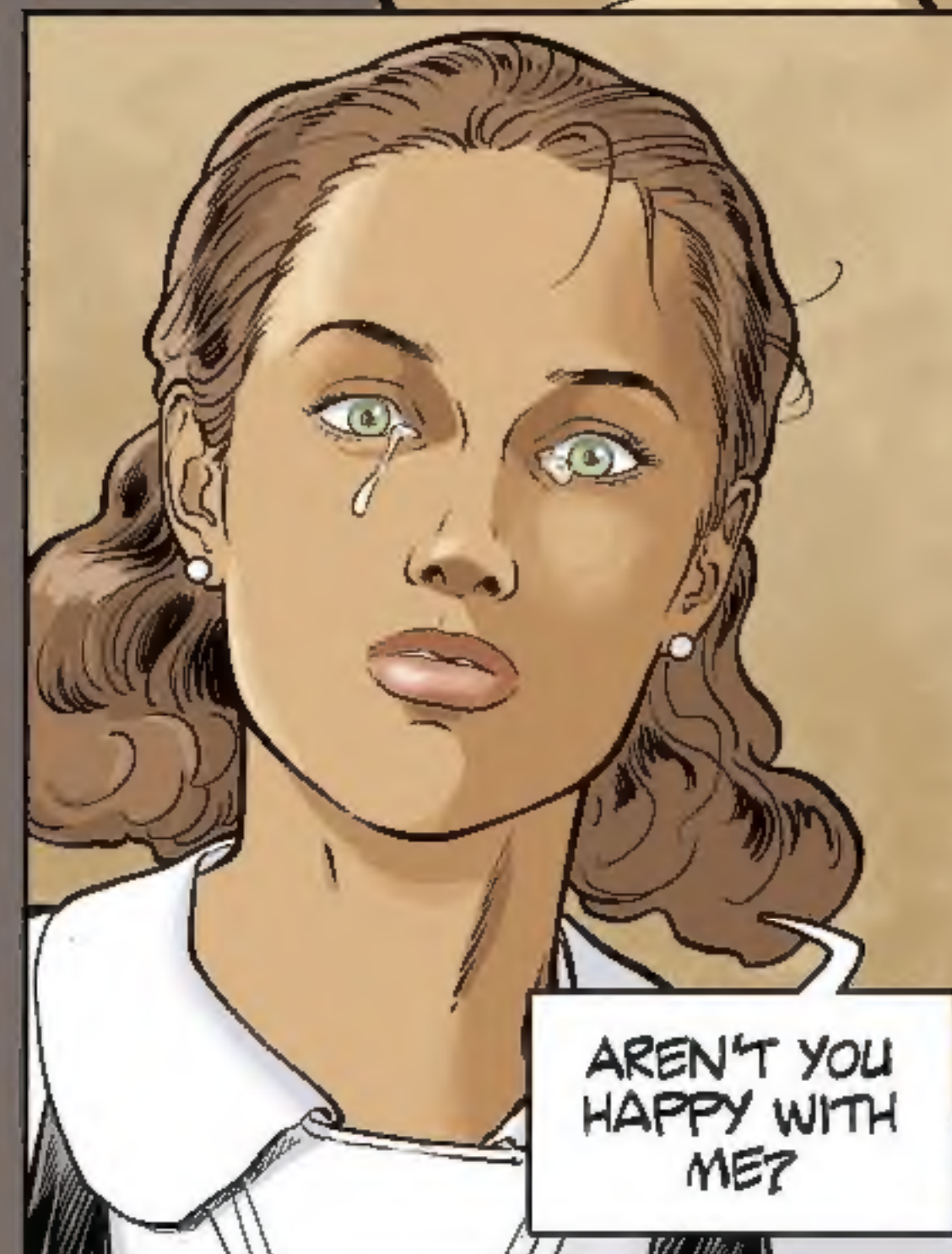
(1) AN AEROBATIC MANEUVER NAMED AFTER GERMAN WWI FIGHTER ACE MAX IMMELMANN.
(2) SEE VOLUME 2, "THE LONG CLIMB."



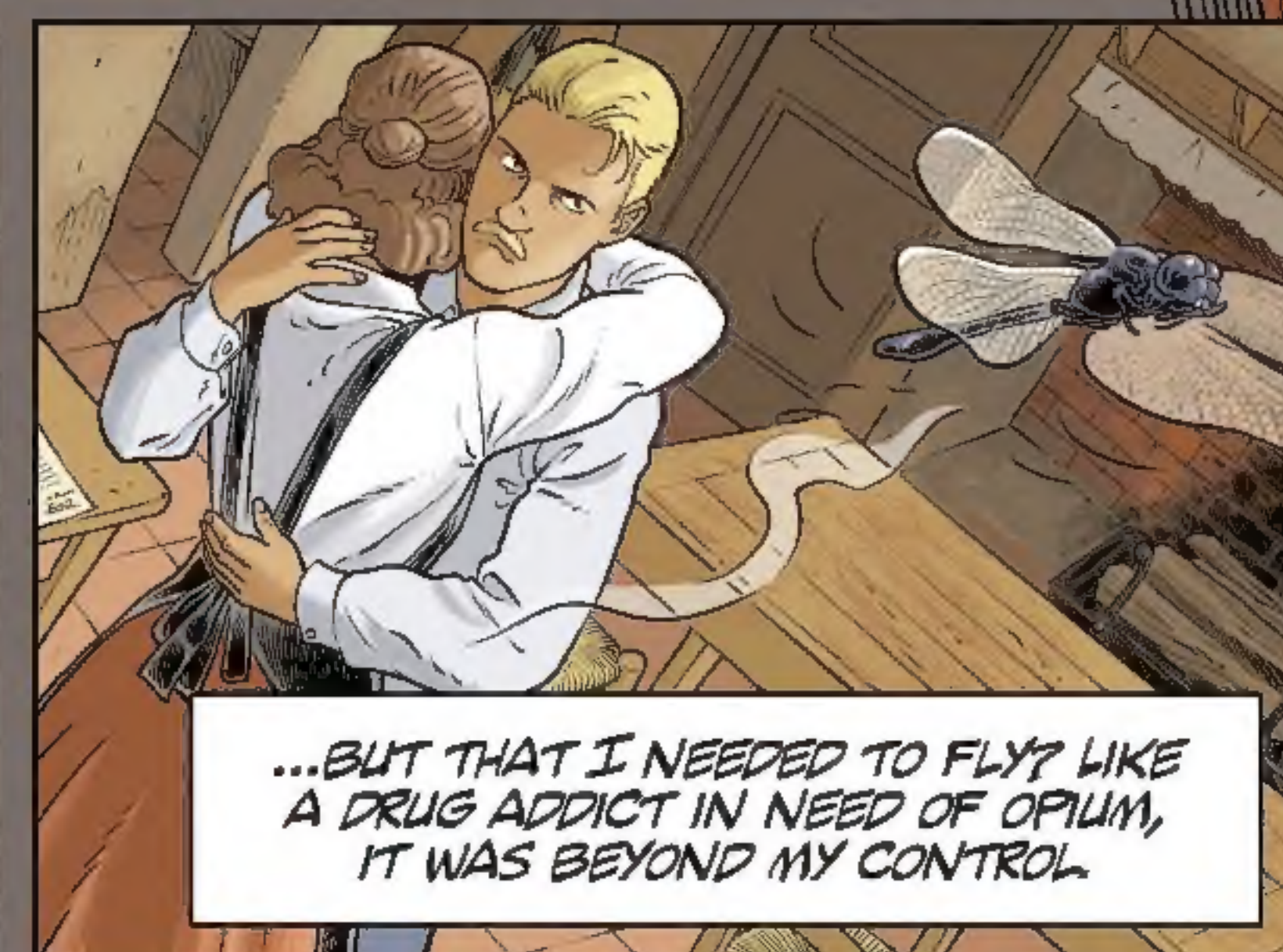
Only a year earlier, Pierre-Georges Latécoère had organized a test flight with the aim of extending his Toulouse-Casablanca airmail route as far as Dakar. The new service would soon be running, and I really wanted to be part of it.



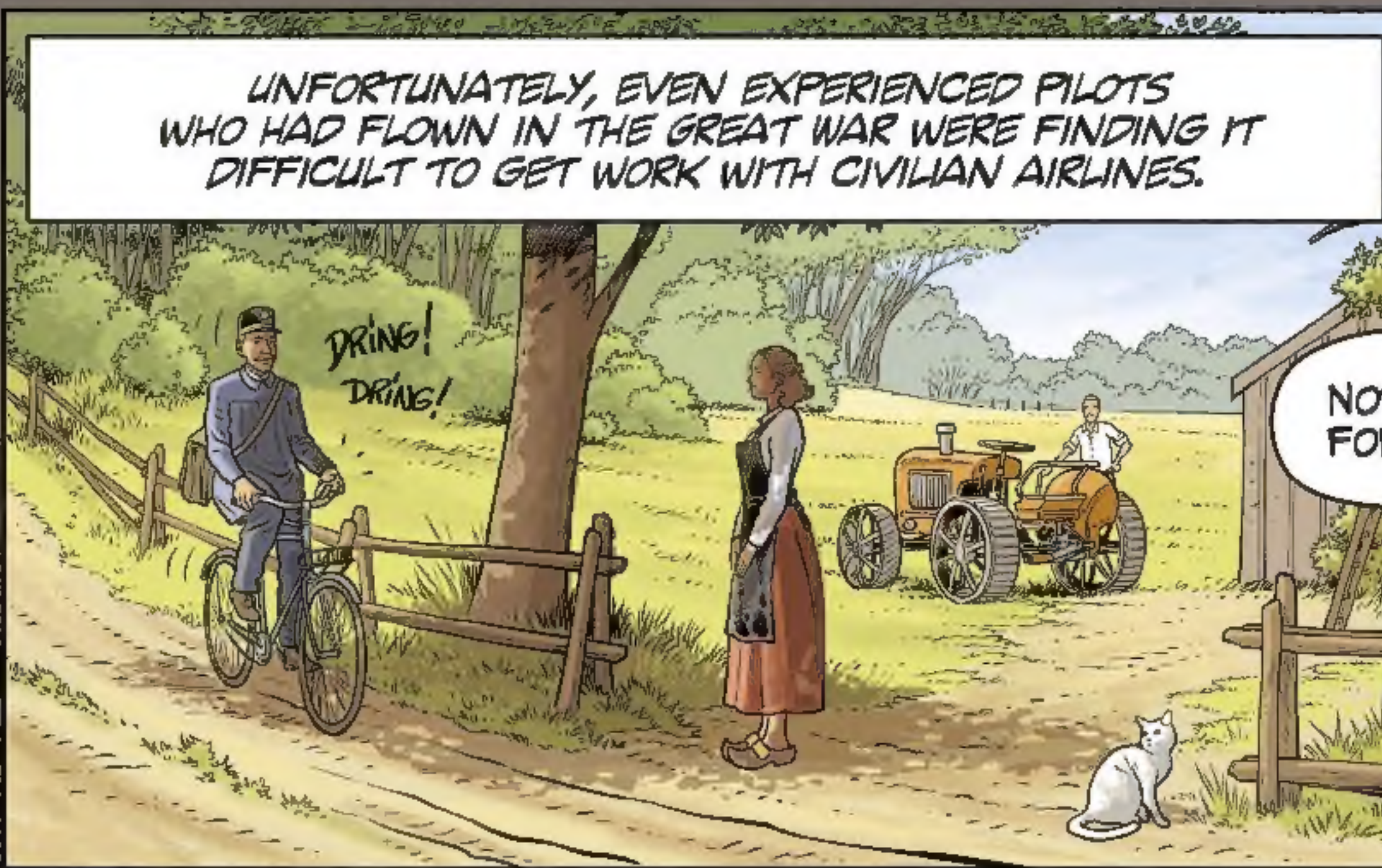
I WAS EAGER TO RETURN TO AFRICA--EVEN IF IT WOULDN'T BE THE AFRICA OF MY CHILDHOOD. (1) BUT WHAT WAS REALLY GNAWING AT ME WAS MY DESIRE TO FLY.



ADELE WAS A WONDERFUL WOMAN. HOW COULD I MAKE HER UNDERSTAND THAT I'D BE THE HAPPIEST MAN ALIVE WITH HER AS A WIFE...



...BUT THAT I NEEDED TO FLY LIKE A DRUG ADDICT IN NEED OF OPIUM, IT WAS BEYOND MY CONTROL.

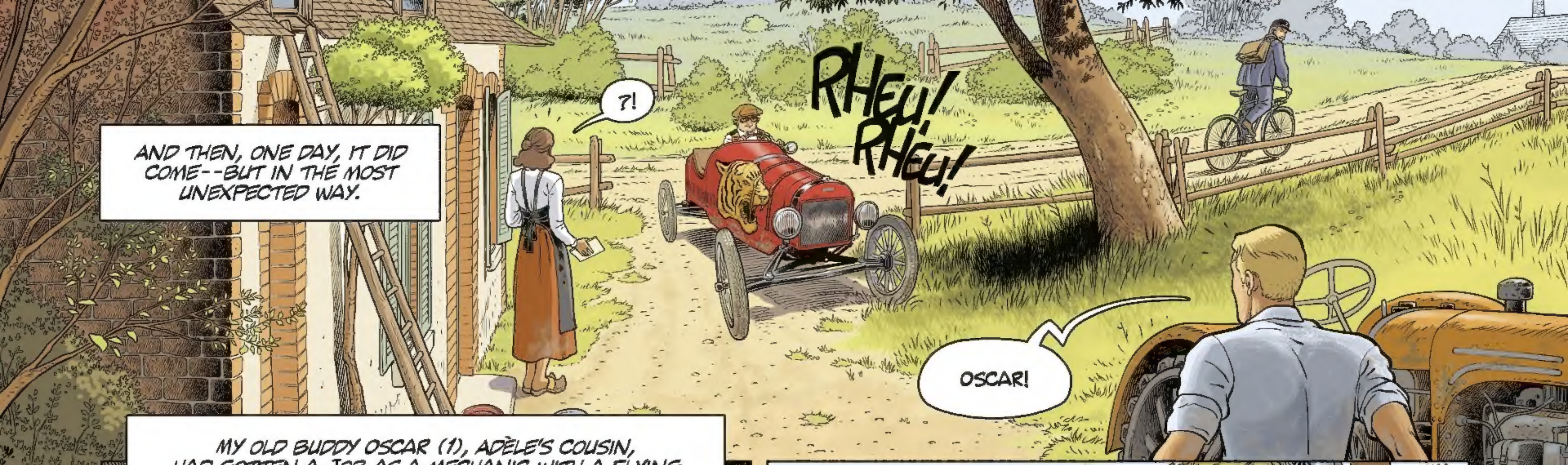


UNFORTUNATELY, EVEN EXPERIENCED PILOTS WHO HAD FLOWN IN THE GREAT WAR WERE FINDING IT DIFFICULT TO GET WORK WITH CIVILIAN AIRLINES.

NOTHING FOR YOU!

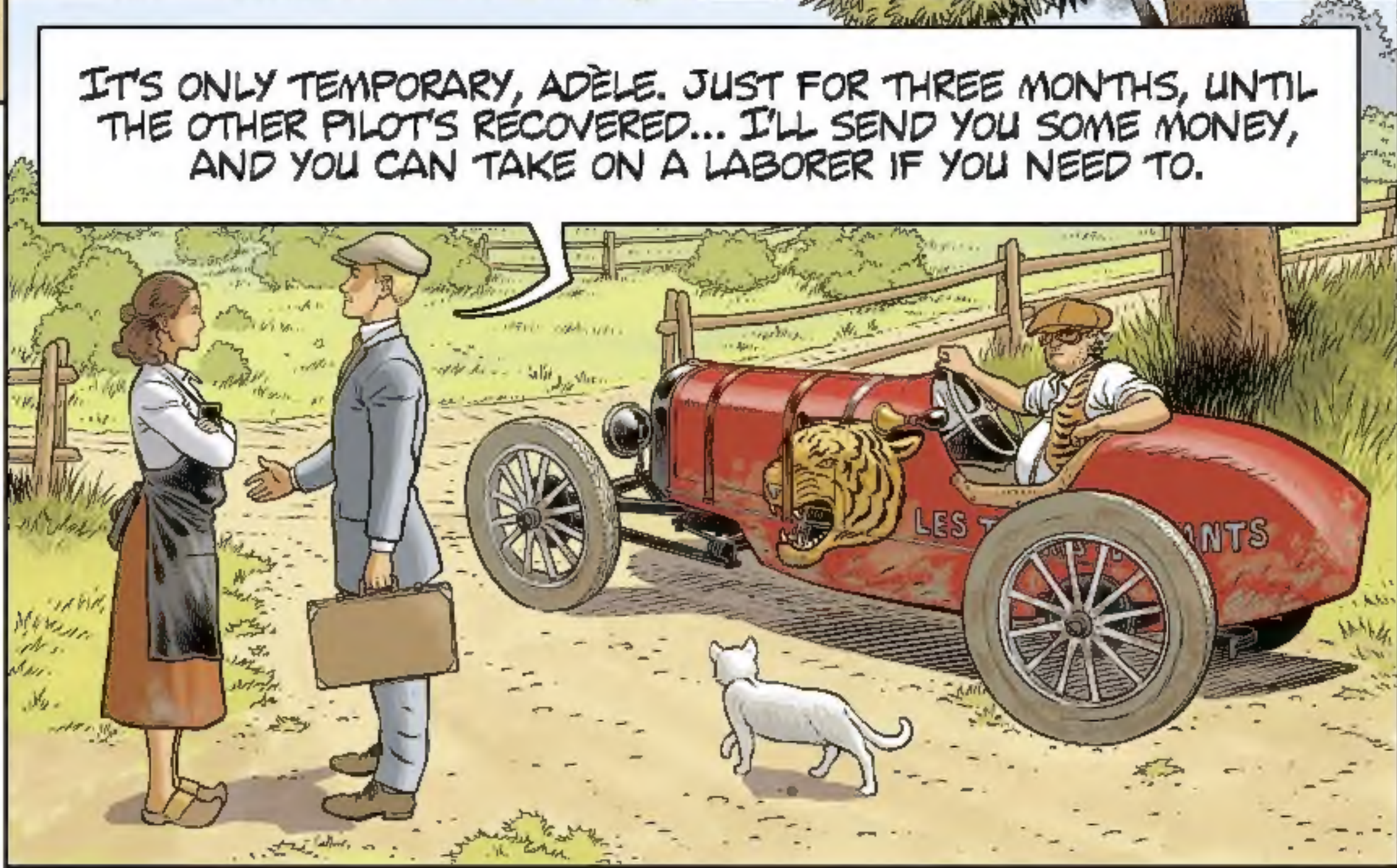
SO I WENT ON CHAMPING AT THE BIT, HOPING MY CHANCE WOULD COME.

(1) SEE VOLUME 1, "TAKE-OFF."



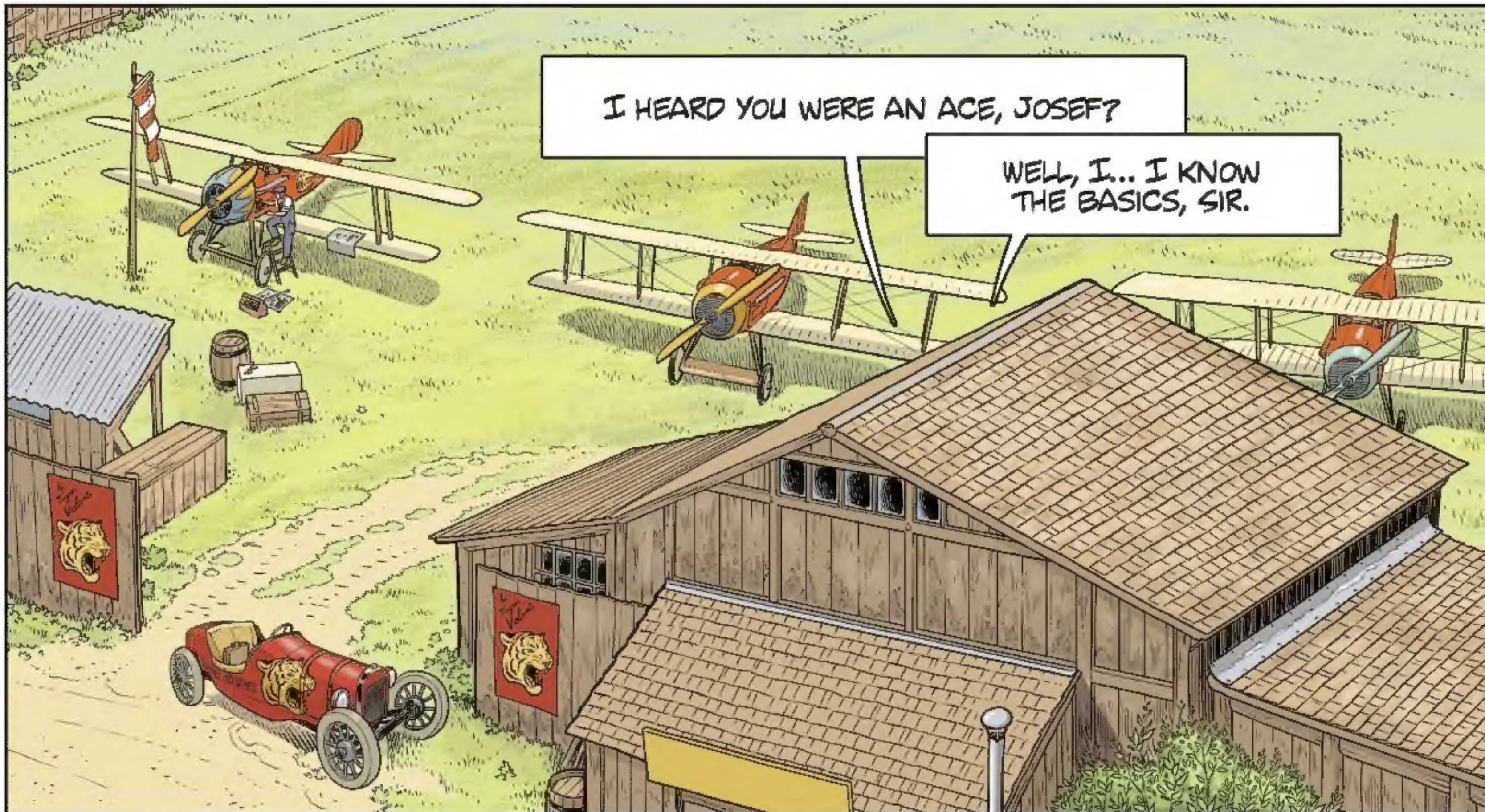
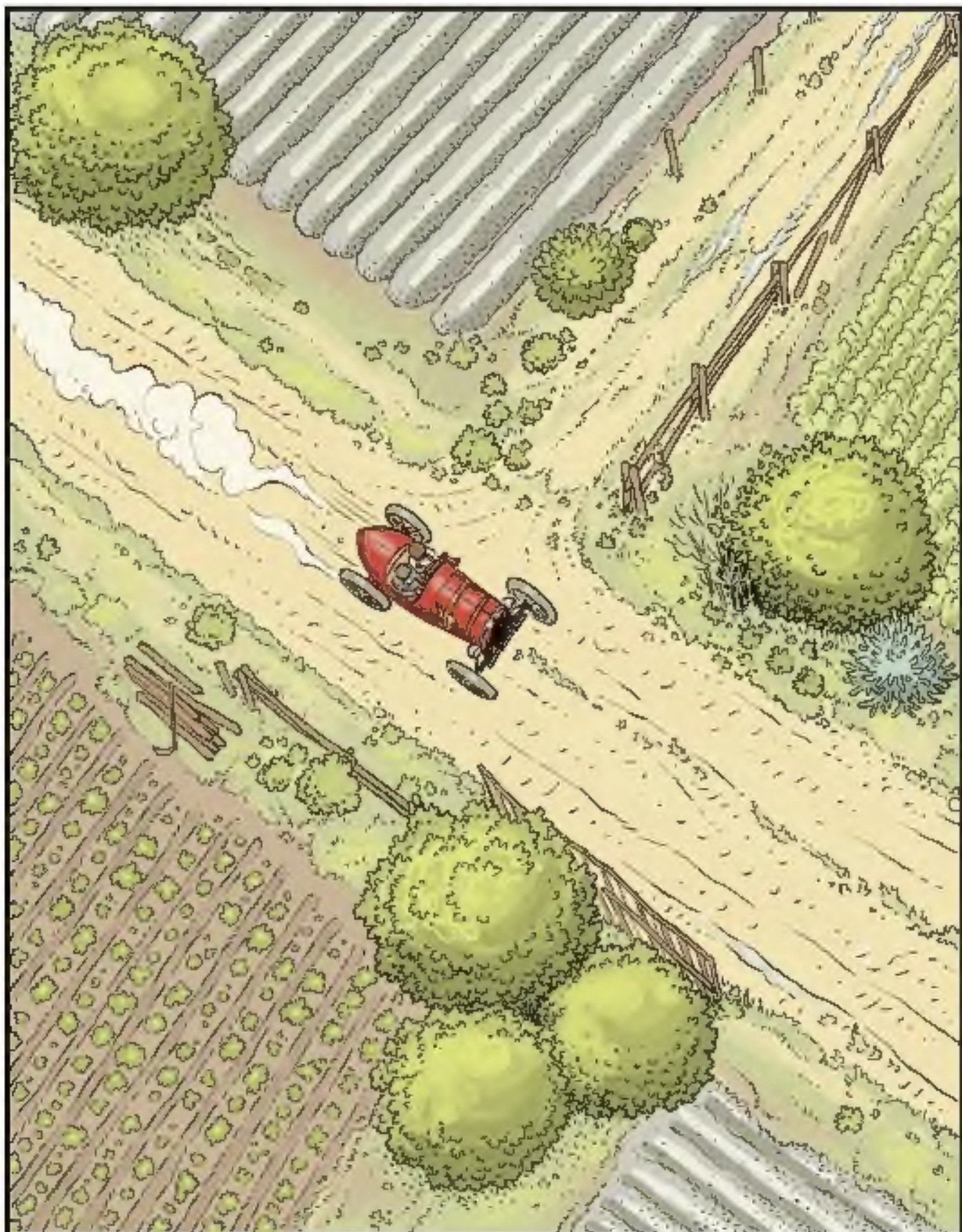
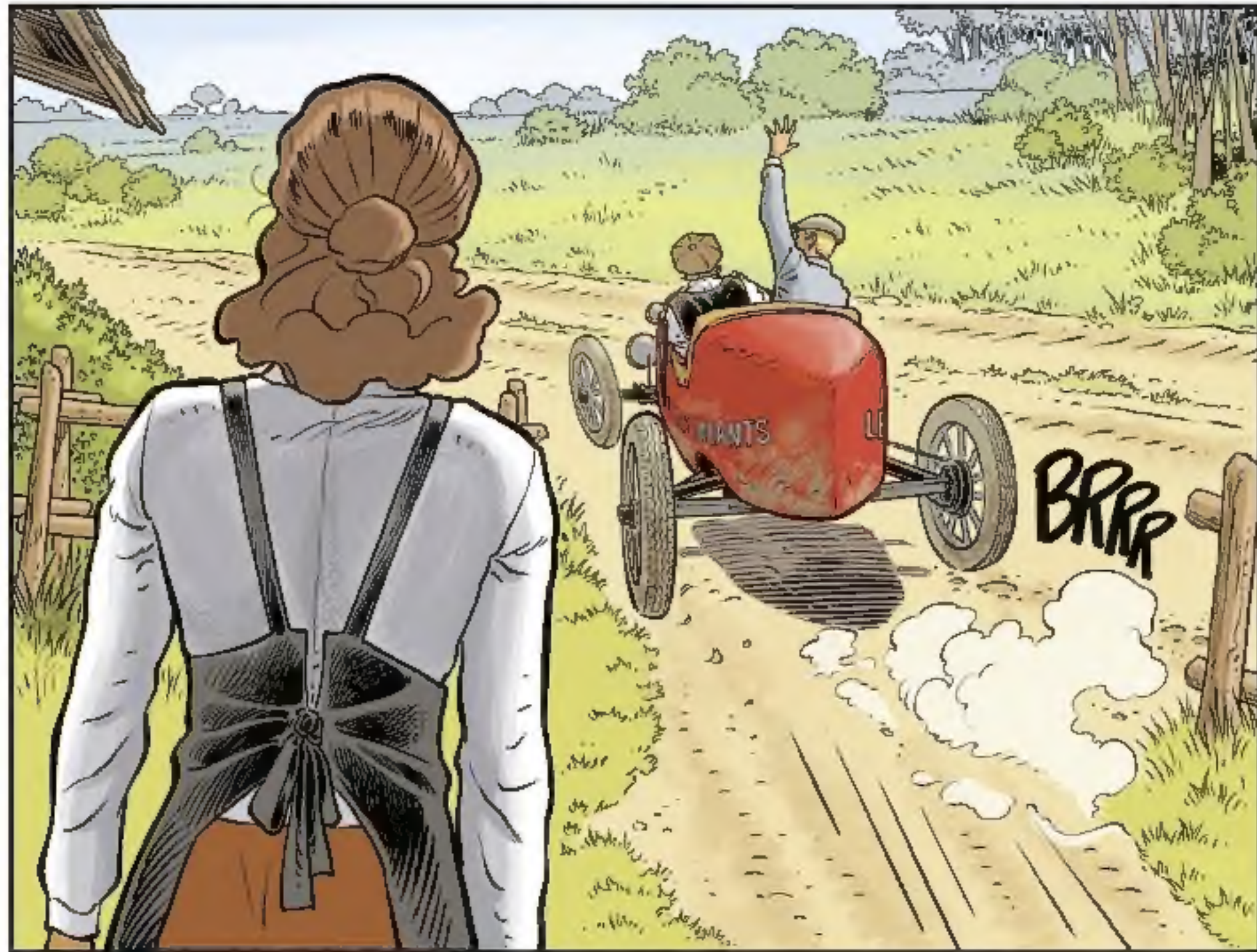
AND THEN, ONE DAY, IT DID COME--BUT IN THE MOST UNEXPECTED WAY.

MY OLD BUDDY OSCAR (1), ADELE'S COUSIN, HAD GOTTEN A JOB AS A MECHANIC WITH A FLYING CIRCUS--ONE OF MANY SMALL TEAMS OF AEROBATIC PILOTS THAT WERE TOURING THE COUNTRY, GIVING PERFORMANCES AND OFFERING PEOPLE THE CHANCE TO REALIZE THEIR DREAM OF FLYING THROUGH THE AIR.

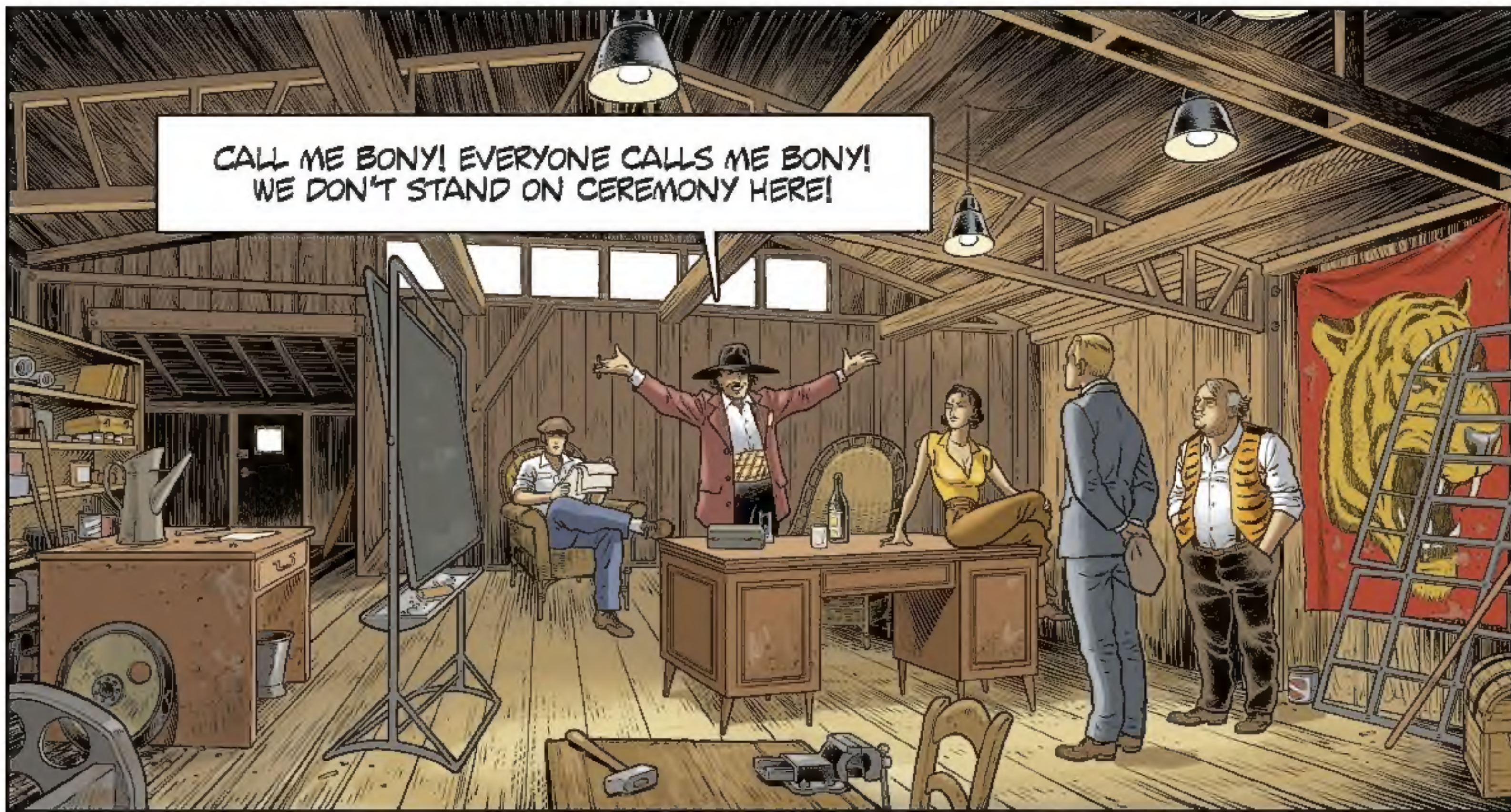


BUT THEY'RE DANGEROUS, THESE CIRCUSES...

I HATE OSCARI!



(1) SEE VOLUME 2.



CALL ME BONY! EVERYONE CALLS ME BONY!
WE DON'T STAND ON CEREMONY HERE!

I HOPE YOU KNOW MORE THAN THE
BASICS, JOE, BECAUSE THERE'S NO
TIME FOR A REHEARSAL--THE SHOW
STARTS IN AN HOUR.

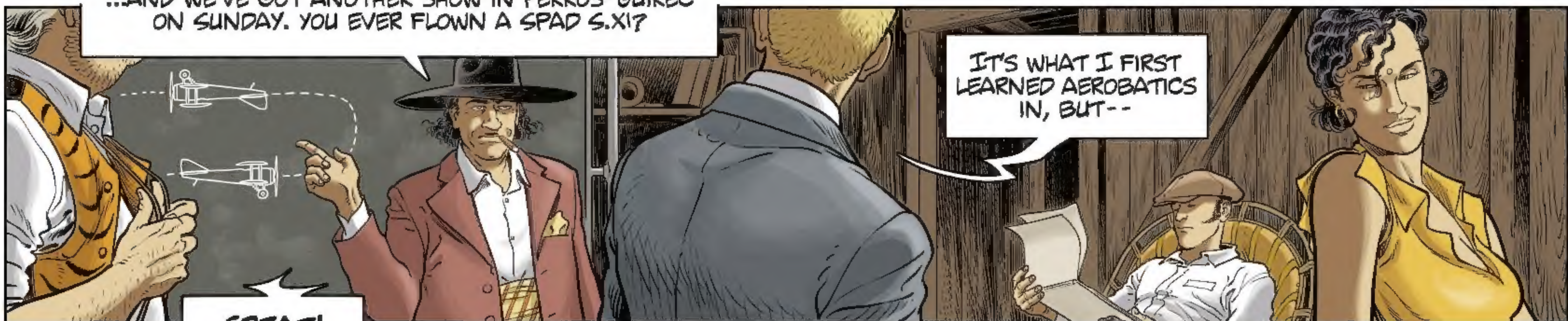


??

CAN'T... CAN'T IT
BE POSTPONED?



I'VE ALREADY SOLD TICKETS,
PEOPLE HAVE PAID TO FLY...



...AND WE'VE GOT ANOTHER SHOW IN PERROS-GUIREC
ON SUNDAY. YOU EVER FLOWN A SPAD S.XI?

IT'S WHAT I FIRST
LEARNED AEROBATICS
IN, BUT--

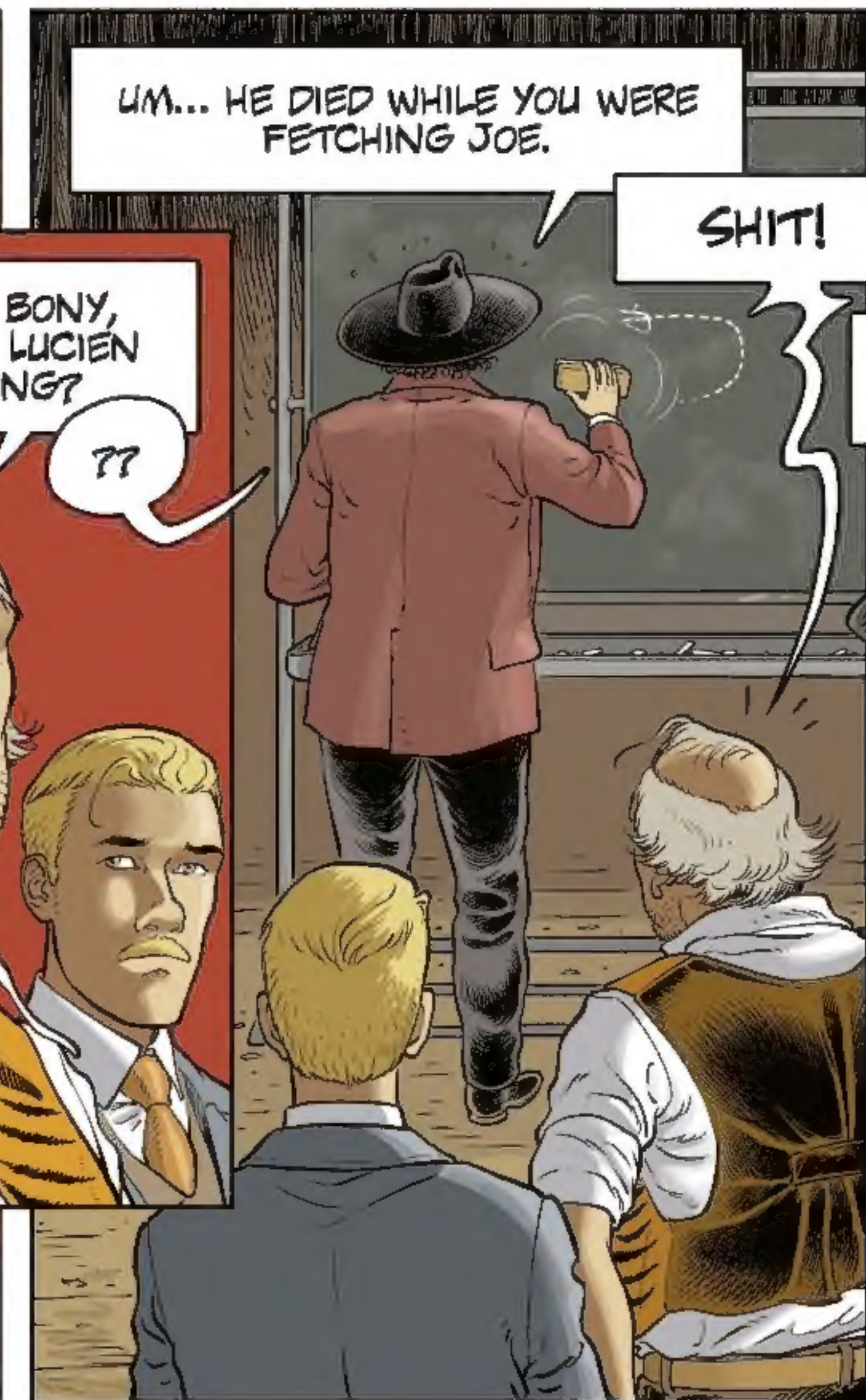
GREAT!



YOU START WITH
SOMETHING SIMPLE--

SAY, BONY,
HOW'S LUCIEN
DOING?

??



UM... HE DIED WHILE YOU WERE
FETCHING JOE.

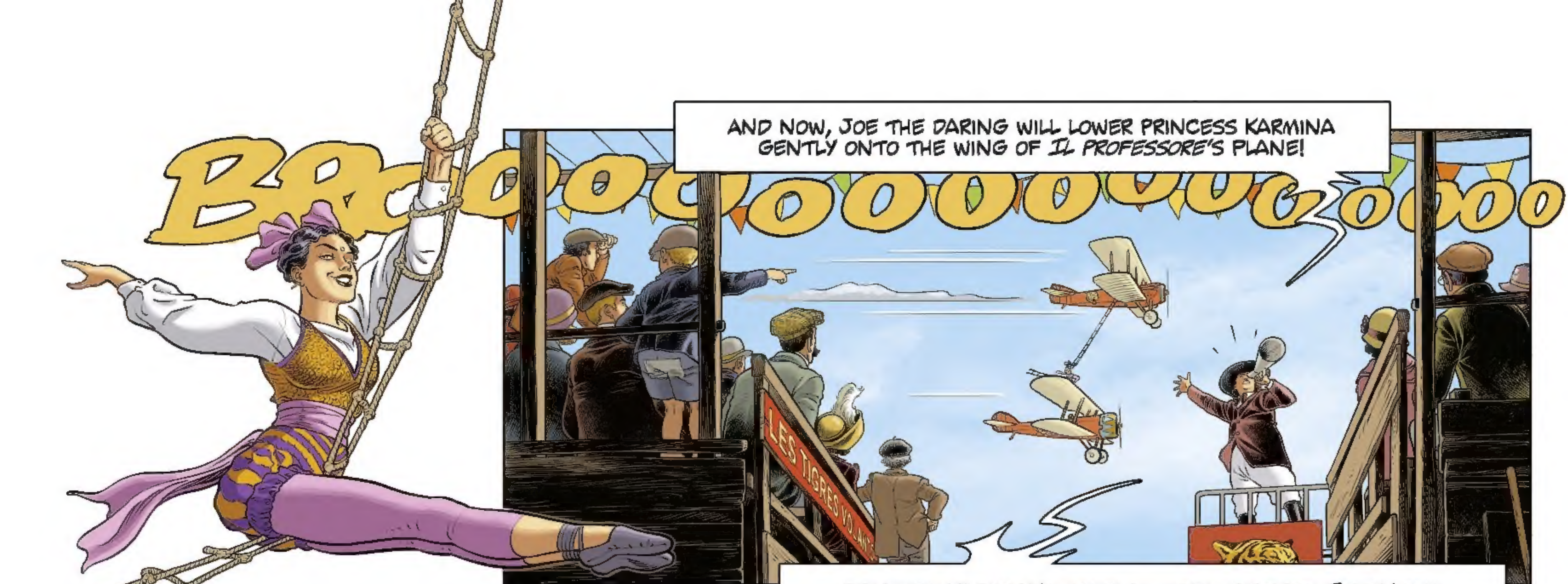
SHIT!



IT WAS A REAL UNLUCKY
ACCIDENT, JOE! THESE THINGS
HAPPEN...

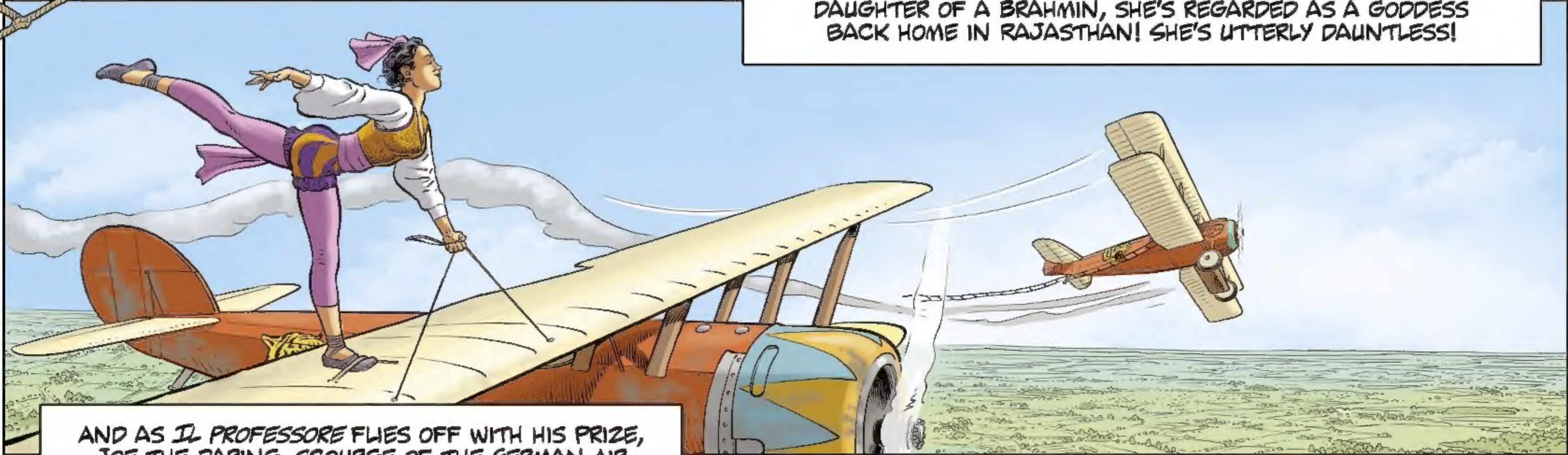
...BUT NOT TOO
OFTEN.

DON'T WORRY!

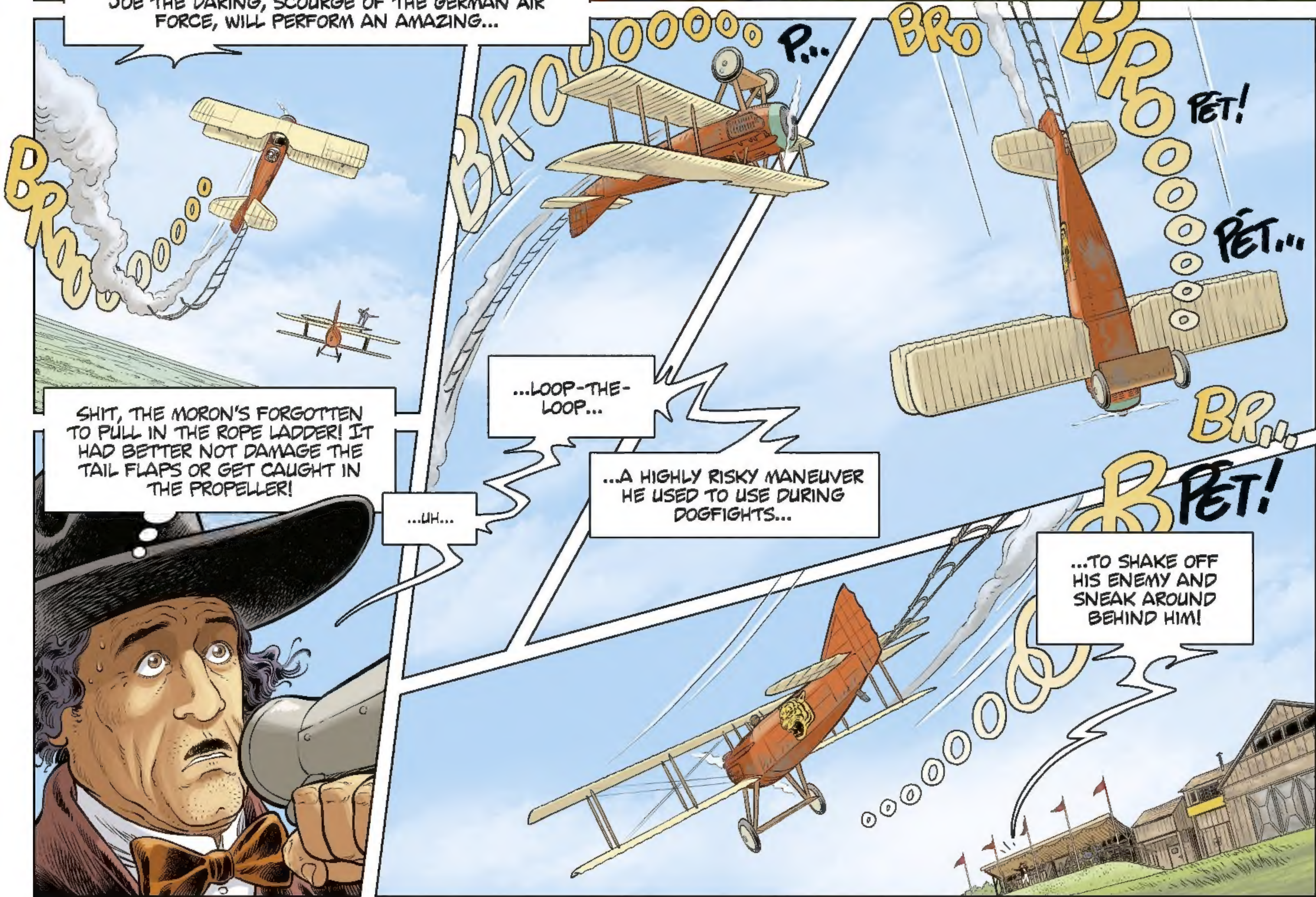


AND NOW, JOE THE DARING WILL LOWER PRINCESS KARMINA GENTLY ONTO THE WING OF IL PROFESSORE'S PLANE!

PRINCESS KARMINA'S COME ALL THE WAY FROM INDIA! THE DAUGHTER OF A BRAHMIN, SHE'S REGARDED AS A GODDESS BACK HOME IN RAJASTHAN! SHE'S UTTERLY DAUNTLESS!



AND AS IL PROFESSORE FLIES OFF WITH HIS PRIZE, JOE THE DARING, SCOURGE OF THE GERMAN AIR FORCE, WILL PERFORM AN AMAZING...

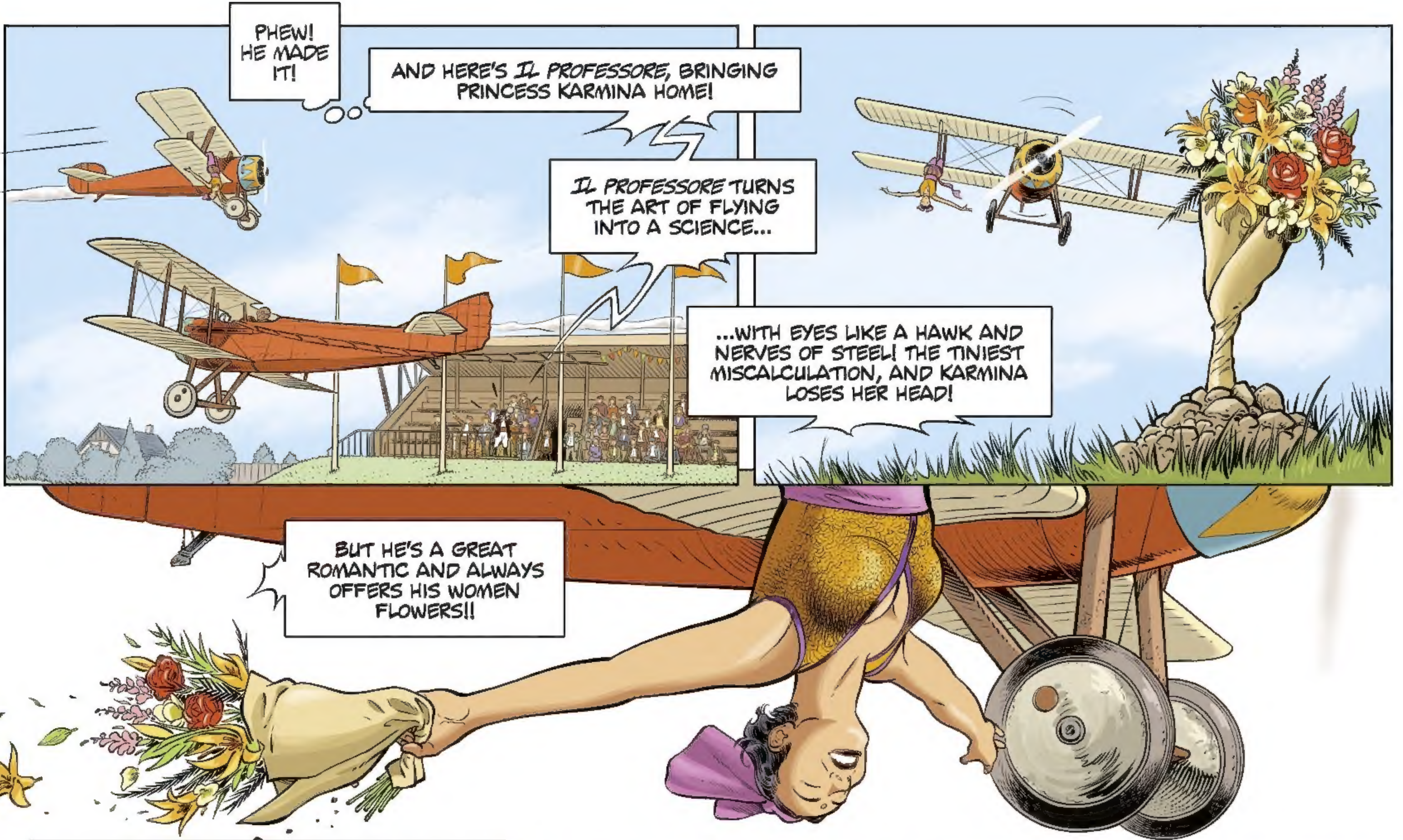


SHIT, THE MORON'S FORGOTTEN TO PULL IN THE ROPE LADDER! IT HAD BETTER NOT DAMAGE THE TAIL FLAPS OR GET CAUGHT IN THE PROPELLER!

...LOOP-THE-LOOP...

...A HIGHLY RISKY MANEUVER HE USED TO USE DURING DOGFIGHTS...

...TO SHAKE OFF HIS ENEMY AND SNEAK AROUND BEHIND HIM!



PHEW!
HE MADE
IT!

AND HERE'S IL PROFESSORE, BRINGING
PRINCESS KARMINA HOME!

IL PROFESSORE TURNS
THE ART OF FLYING
INTO A SCIENCE...

...WITH EYES LIKE A HAWK AND
NERVES OF STEEL! THE TINIEST
MISCALCULATION, AND KARMINA
LOSES HER HEAD!

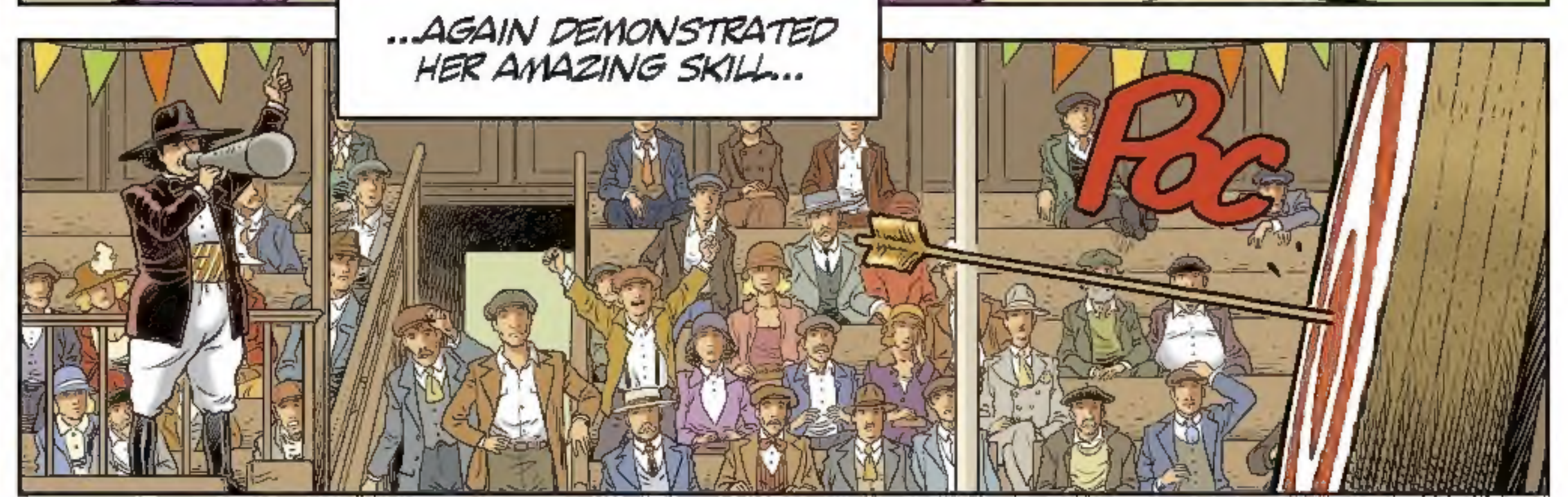
BUT HE'S A GREAT
ROMANTIC AND ALWAYS
OFFERS HIS WOMEN
FLOWERS!!



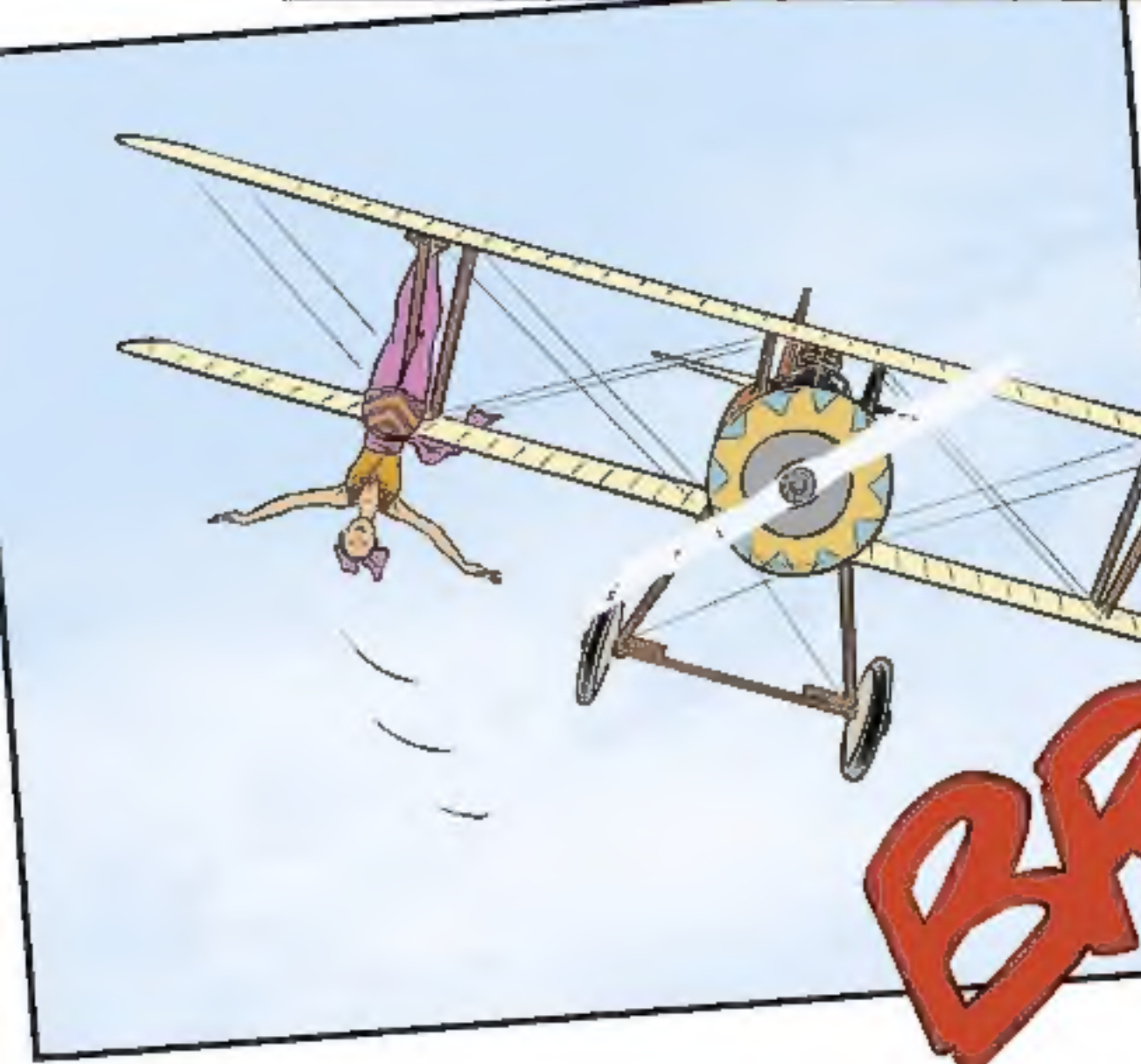
THE SENTIMENTAL STUNT HAD THE CROWD
CHEERING WILDLY IN THE STANDS.



IT WAS
FOLLOWED BY
OTHERS, IN
WHICH THE
PRINCESS...

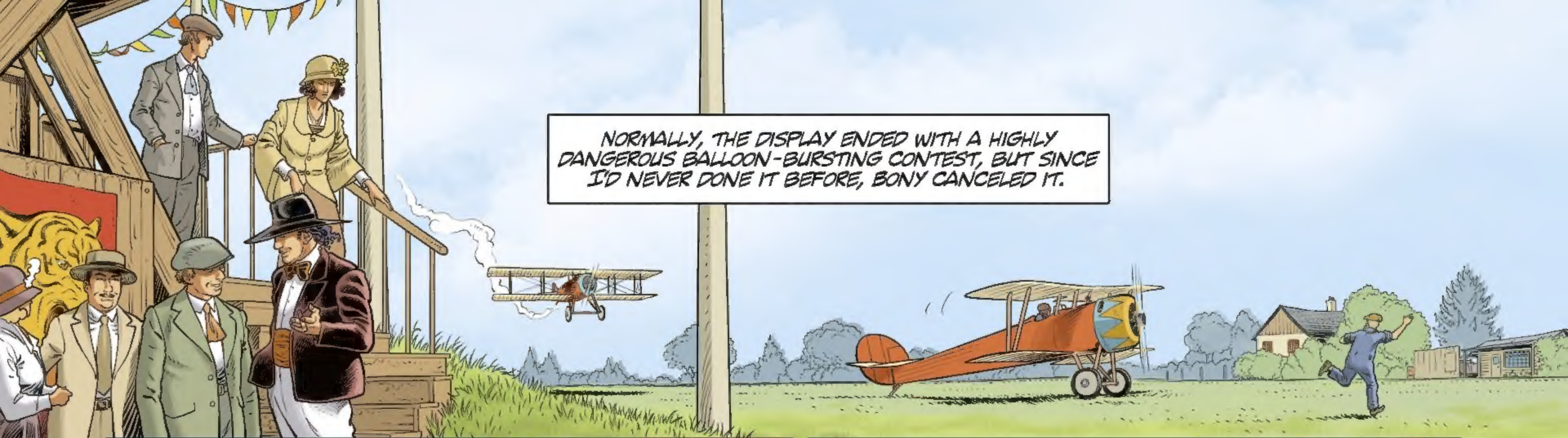


...AGAIN DEMONSTRATED
HER AMAZING SKILL...



...AND BREATHTAKING FEARLESSNESS!

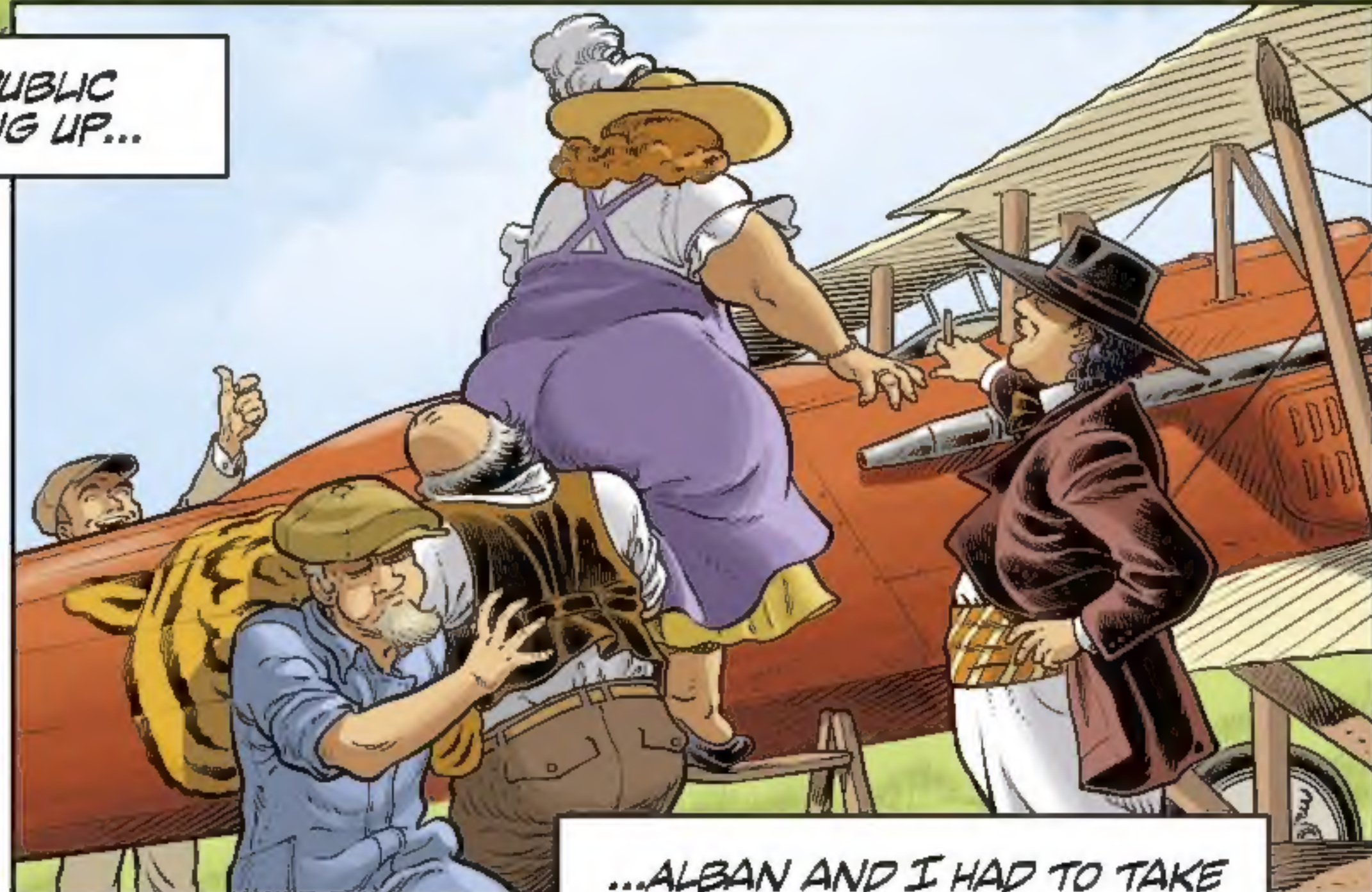




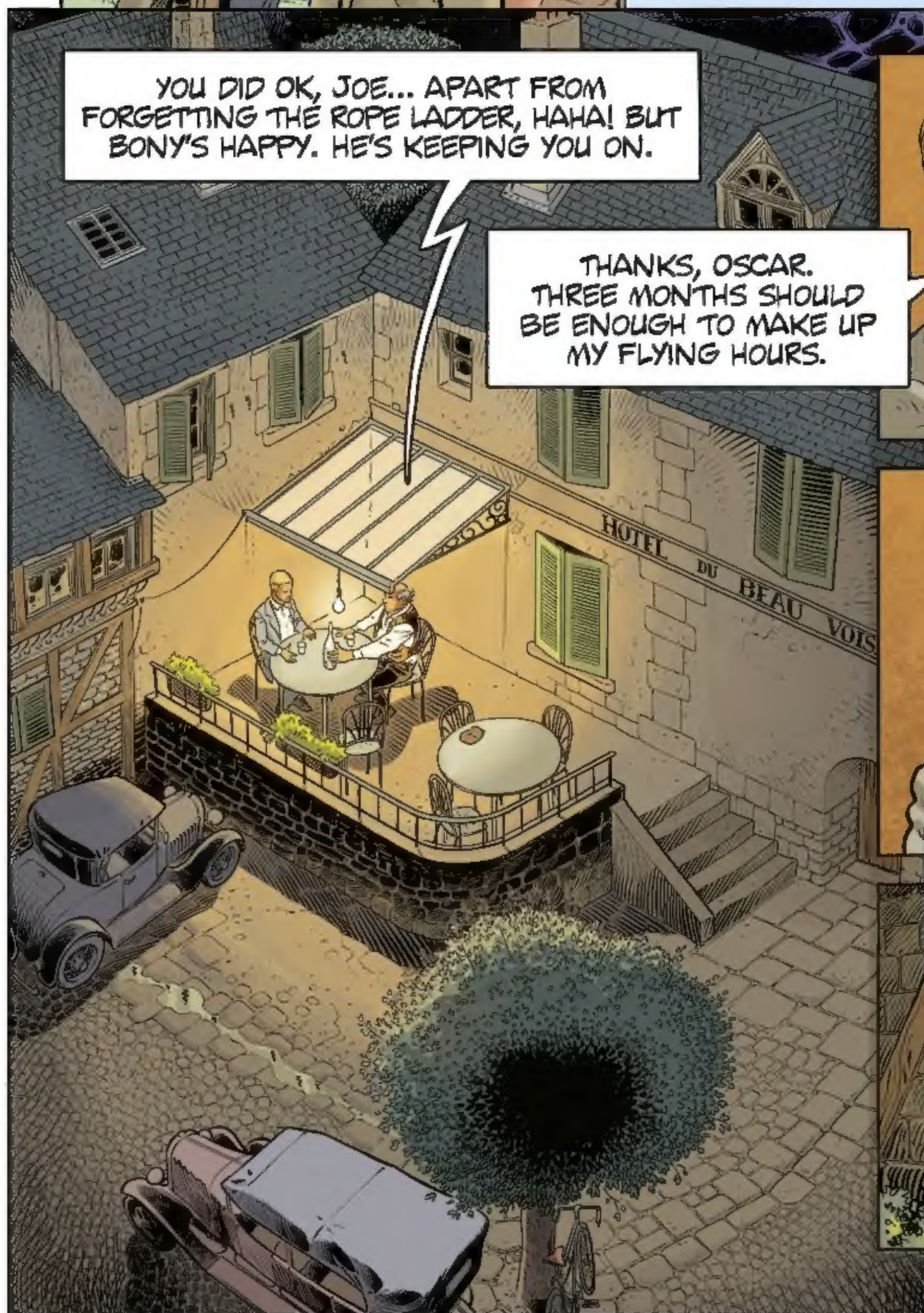
NORMALLY, THE DISPLAY ENDED WITH A HIGHLY DANGEROUS BALLOON-BURSTING CONTEST, BUT SINCE I'D NEVER DONE IT BEFORE, BONY CANCELED IT.



THEN CAME THE MOST PROFITABLE PART OF THE SHOW--THE PUBLIC FLIGHTS. SINCE THE ENGINE ON ONE OF THE SPADS WAS PLAYING UP...

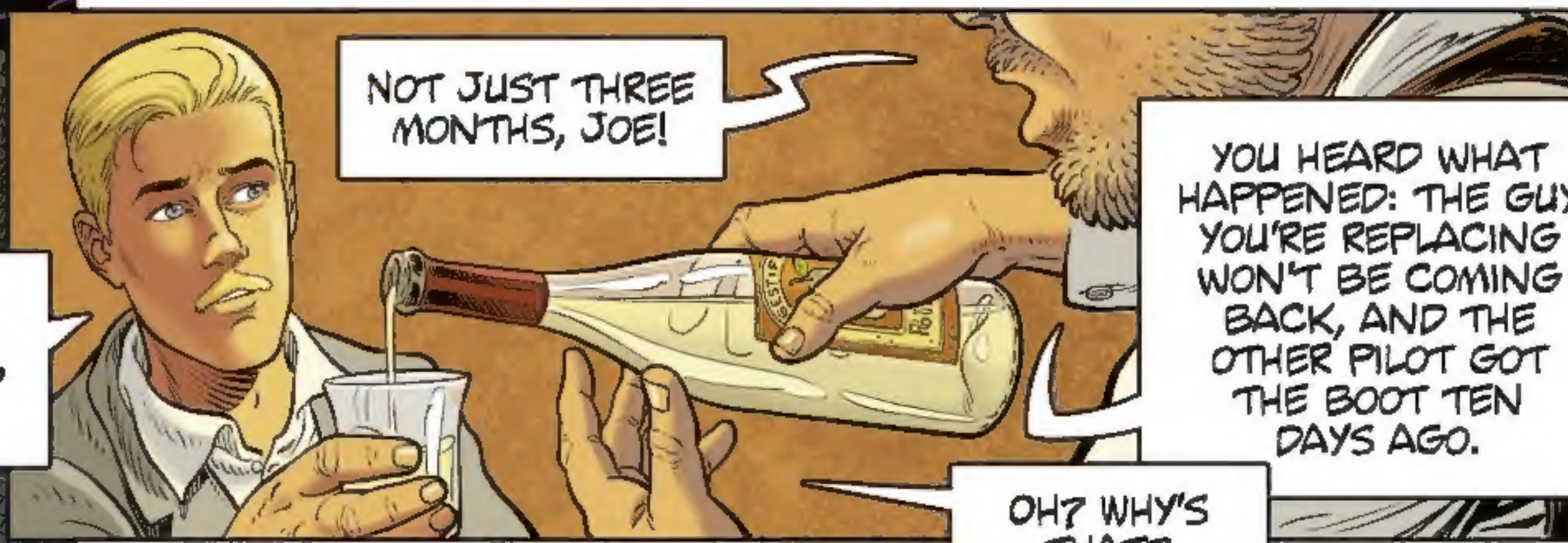


...ALBAN AND I HAD TO TAKE IT IN TURNS TO THRILL AND TERRIFY INTREPID CUSTOMERS IN THE ONE SERVICEABLE PLANE. WE WERE AT IT THE WHOLE AFTERNOON.



YOU DID OK, JOE... APART FROM FORGETTING THE ROPE LADDER, HAHA! BUT BONY'S HAPPY. HE'S KEEPING YOU ON.

THANKS, OSCAR. THREE MONTHS SHOULD BE ENOUGH TO MAKE UP MY FLYING HOURS.



NOT JUST THREE MONTHS, JOE!

YOU HEARD WHAT HAPPENED: THE GUY YOU'RE REPLACING WON'T BE COMING BACK, AND THE OTHER PILOT GOT THE BOOT TEN DAYS AGO.

OH? WHY'S THAT?



HE PERFORMED ONE TOO MANY STUNTS--BONY CAUGHT HIM DOING ACROBATICS WITH PRINCESS KARMINA... IN A HAYSTACK!

I SEE...

I HAVE TO SAY, THAT WOMAN'S INCREDIBLY BRAVE.



SHE'S A FORCE OF NATURE! SHE LIVES LIFE TO THE FULLEST AND FEARS NOTHING. SO IF YOU WANT TO STAY WITH THE FLYING TIGERS, WATCH OUT FOR HER!



TELL ME, OSCAR, IF I STAY HERE, WILL YOUR COUSIN HATE YOU FOREVER?



IF YOU BECOME A PROFESSIONAL PILOT, SHE CAN GET SOMEONE TO MANAGE THE FARM AND COME LIVE WITH YOU.



BECOME A PROFESSIONAL PILOT?

I WISH...



UH... JOE... LOOK, KID, I DON'T WANNA FRY, BUT...

IF YOU LOVE HER, MARRY HER.



I DO LOVE HER, OSCAR. REALLY. ADELE'S PERFECT...

BUT... I DON'T KNOW IF...



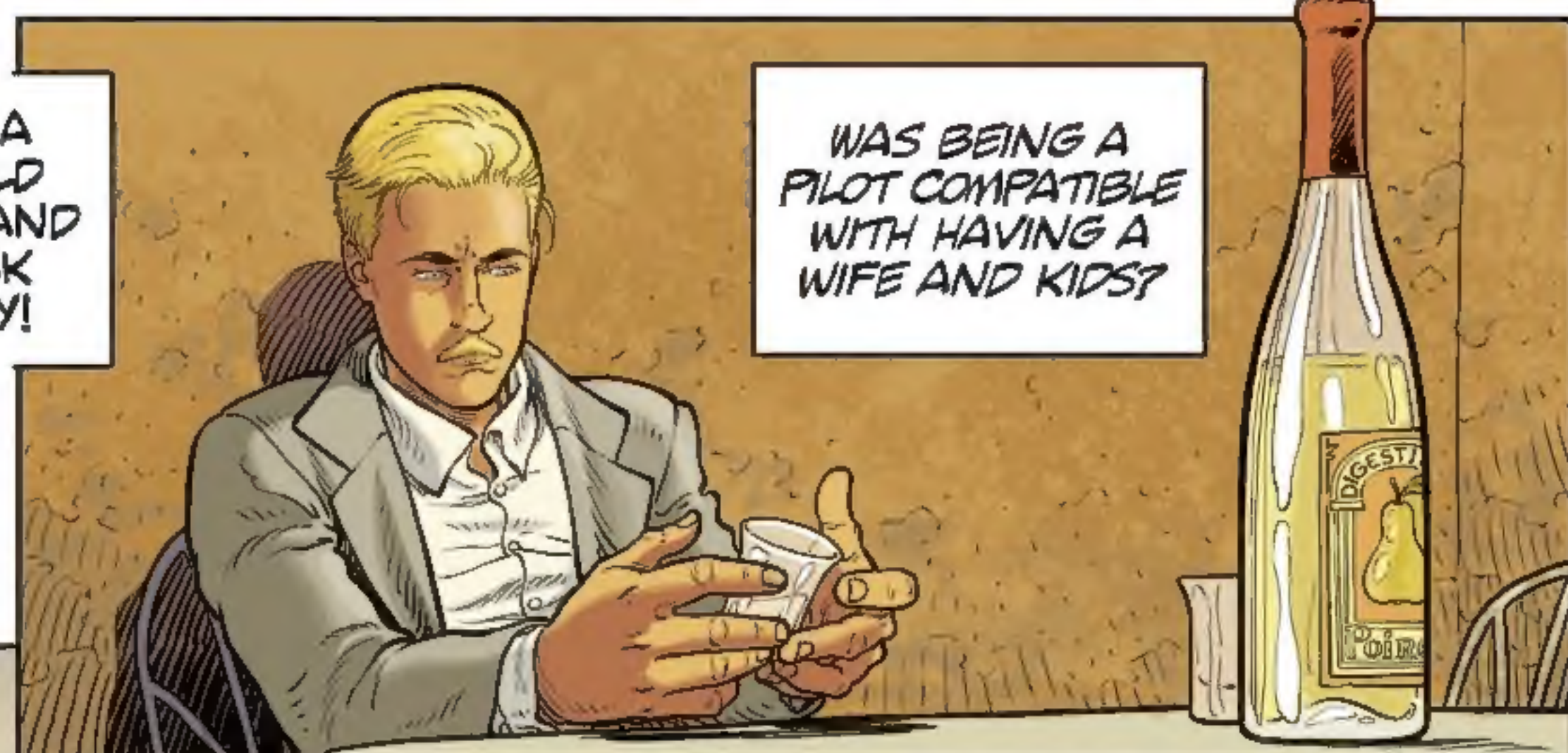
I GET IT, JOE. I UNDERSTAND. I WAS THE SAME...

BUT TELL HER, AT LEAST! SHE ALREADY LOST ONE FELLA IN THE WAR.



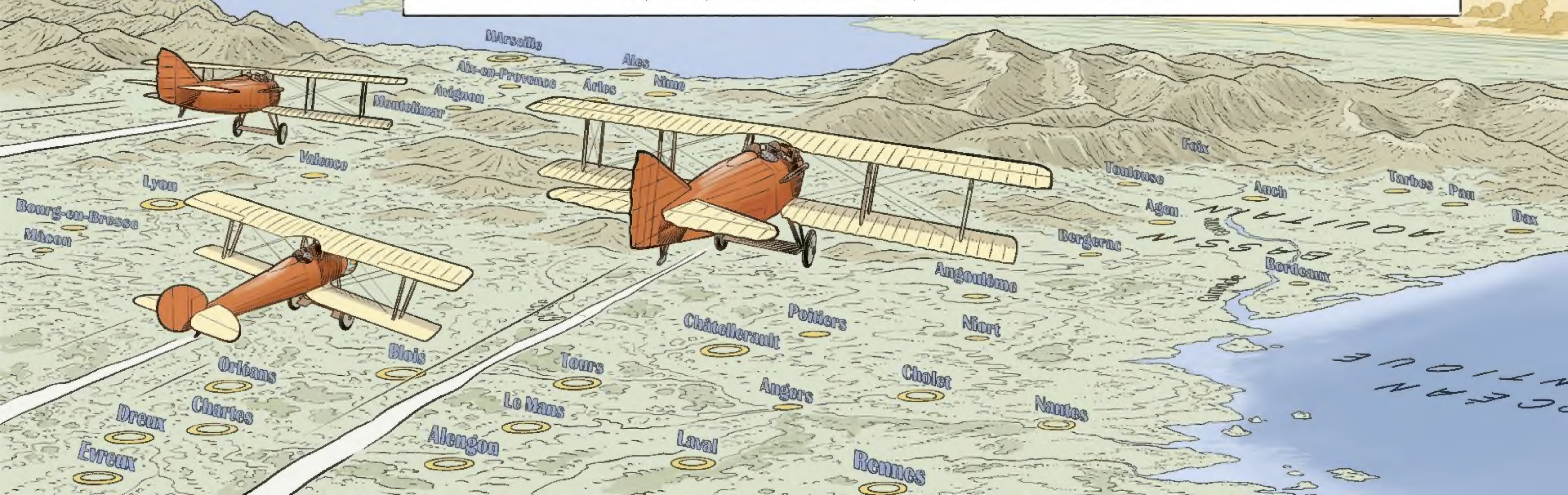
BUT DON'T DO WHAT I DID! I LET A LOT OF "PERFECT" WOMEN SLIP THROUGH MY FINGERS...

NOW I'M A LONELY OLD BASTARD, AND I'M STUCK THAT WAY!

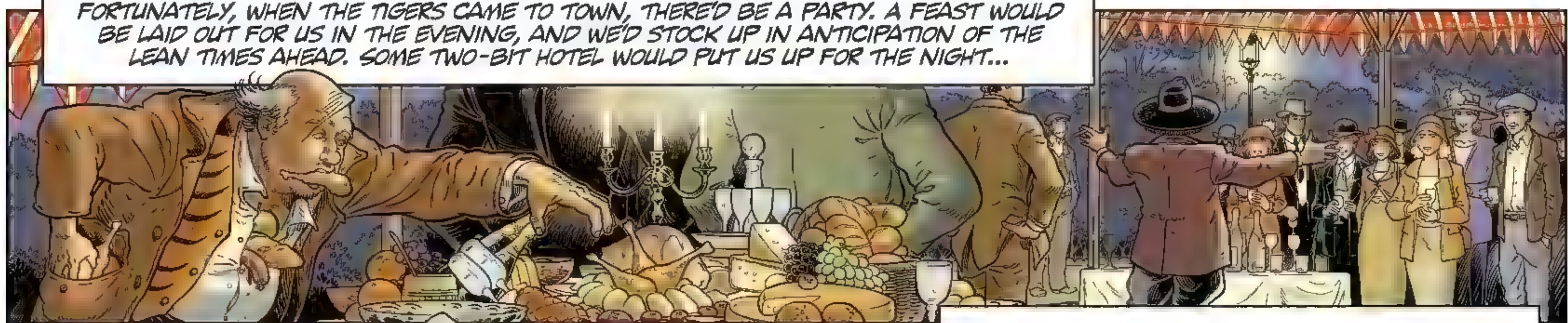


WAS BEING A PILOT COMPATIBLE WITH HAVING A WIFE AND KIDS?

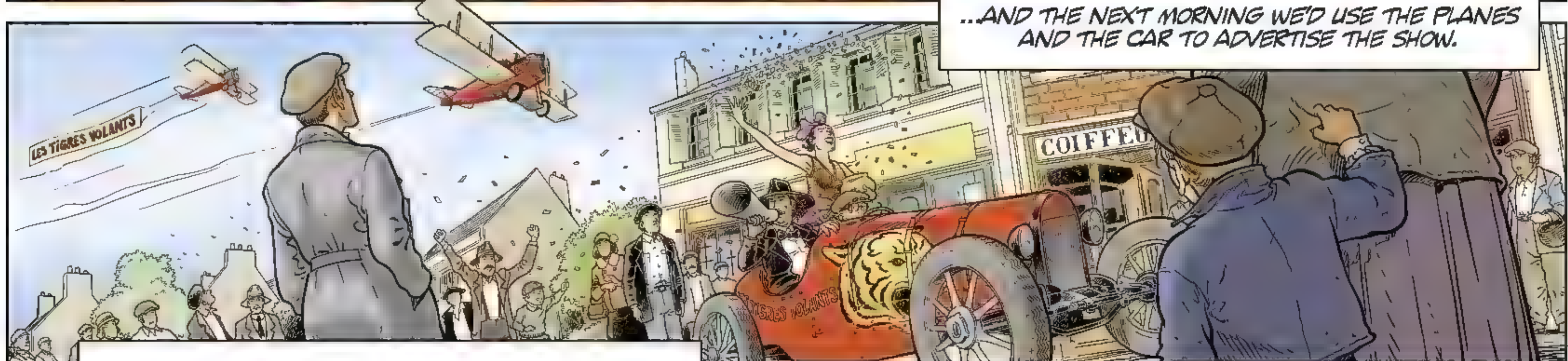
THAT SUMMER OF 1924, I FLEW ALL OVER FRANCE WITH THE TIGERS, AND PRETTY SOON I REALIZED THAT THEY WERE IN A PRECARIOUS FINANCIAL POSITION. BONY FOUND A THIRD PILOT, BUT WHAT WITH HOTELS, FUEL, AND MAINTENANCE, WE LIVED ON CRUMBS MOST OF THE TIME.



FORTUNATELY, WHEN THE TIGERS CAME TO TOWN, THERE'D BE A PARTY. A FEAST WOULD BE LAID OUT FOR US IN THE EVENING, AND WE'D STOCK UP IN ANTICIPATION OF THE LEAN TIMES AHEAD. SOME TWO-BIT HOTEL WOULD PUT US UP FOR THE NIGHT...



...AND THE NEXT MORNING WE'D USE THE PLANES AND THE CAR TO ADVERTISE THE SHOW.



WE WERE AT THE MERCY OF THE WEATHER, TOO. NO SUN, AND THE TAKINGS WOULD BE LOW. RAIN OR HIGH WINDS, AND IT WAS A DISASTER.



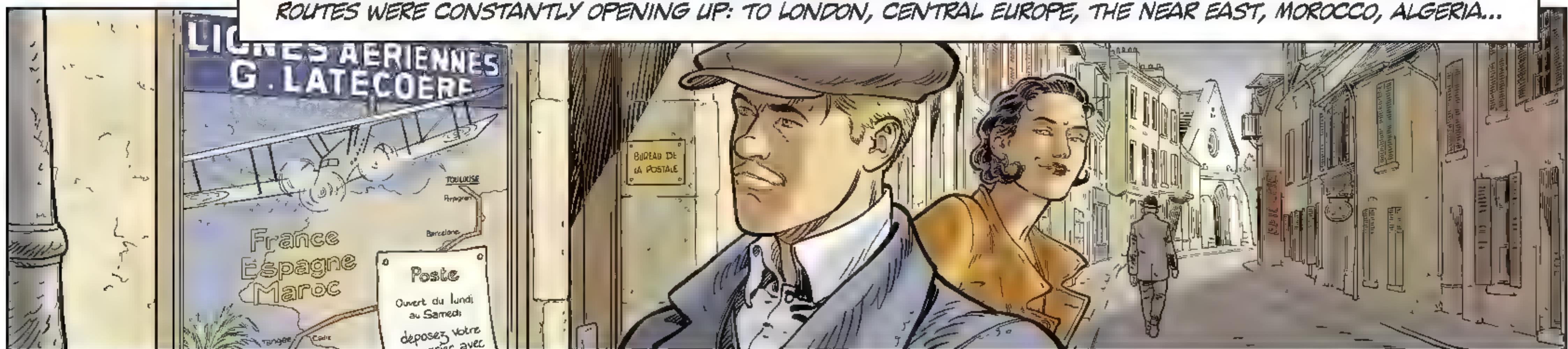
I WENT BACK TO THE FARM TO SEE ADELE WHEN I COULD, BUT I WASN'T EARNING ENOUGH TO ASK HER TO TRAVEL WITH ME. AND IN THE END, SHE JUST GOT FED UP WITH IT. IT WAS A DIFFICULT TIME-- ESPECIALLY FOR HER, I HAVE TO ADMIT.

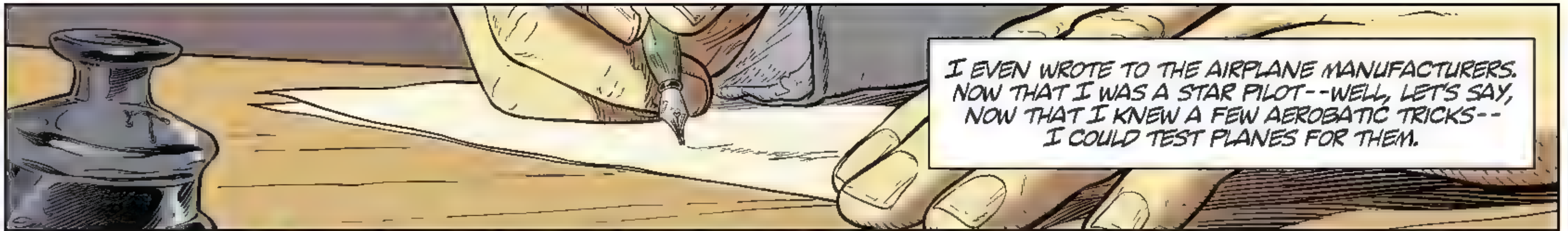


AS FOR ME, I WAS LEARNING A LOT FROM ALBAN, WHO WAS AN EXCELLENT PILOT AND, THOUGH A MAN OF FEW WORDS, A GOOD TEACHER. ABOVE ALL, I WAS CLOCKING UP FLYING TIME!

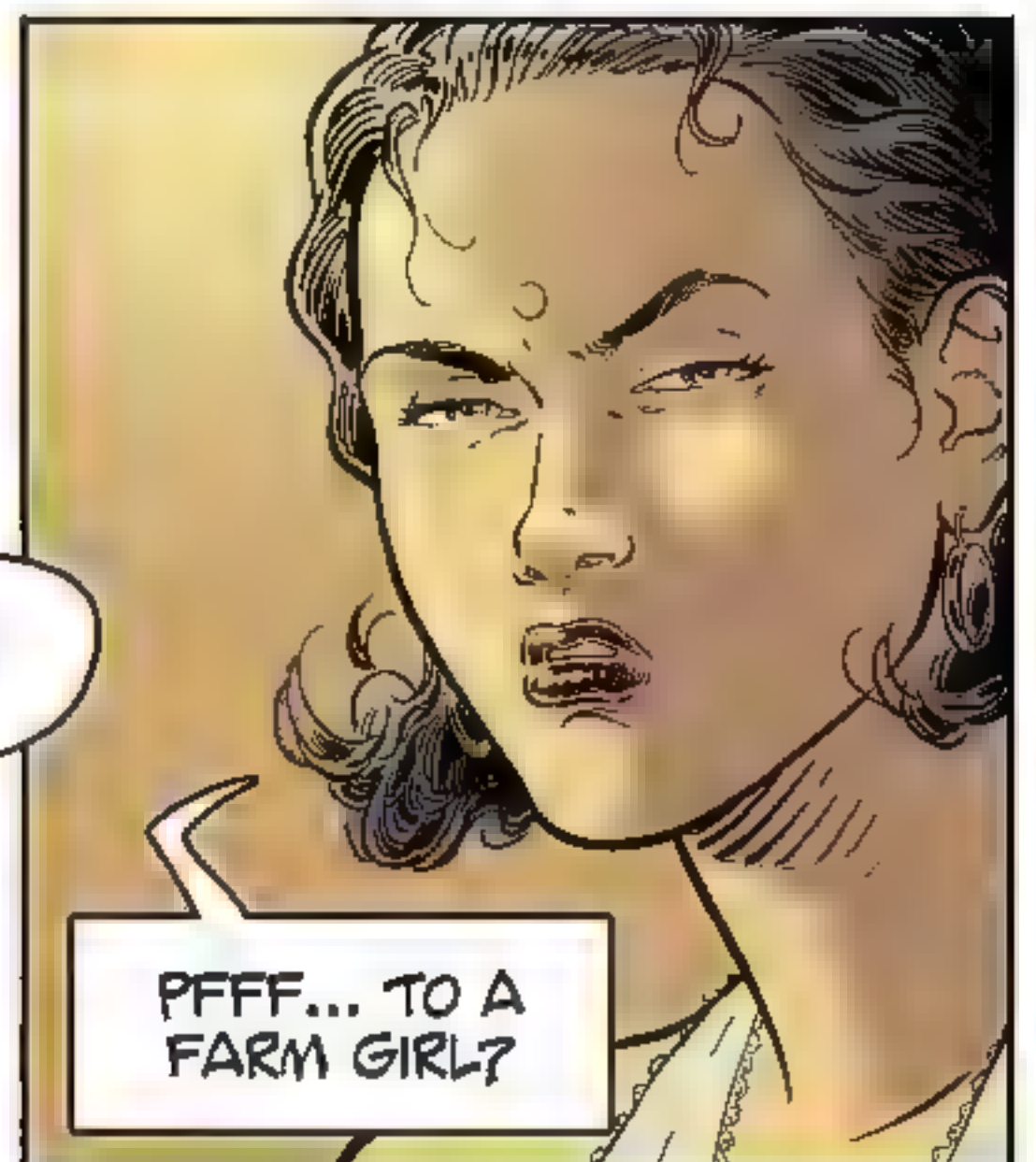
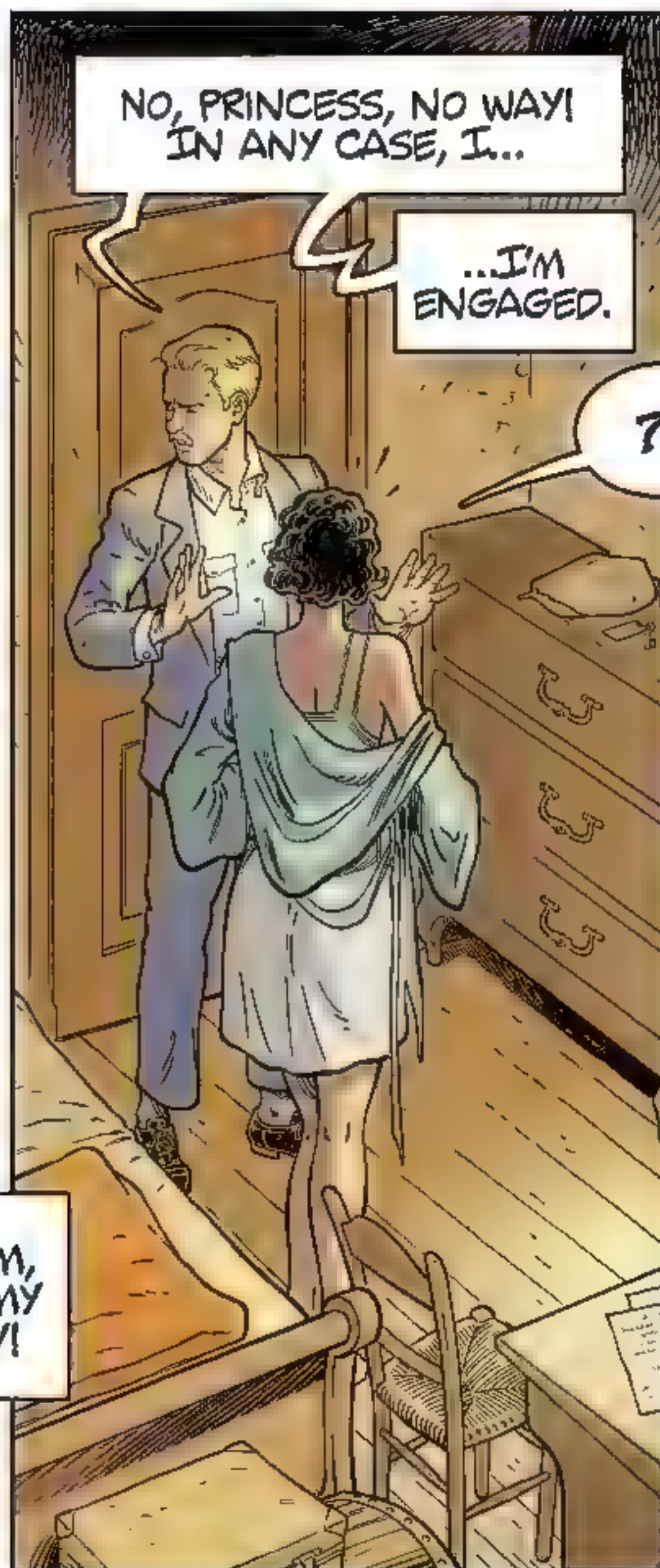
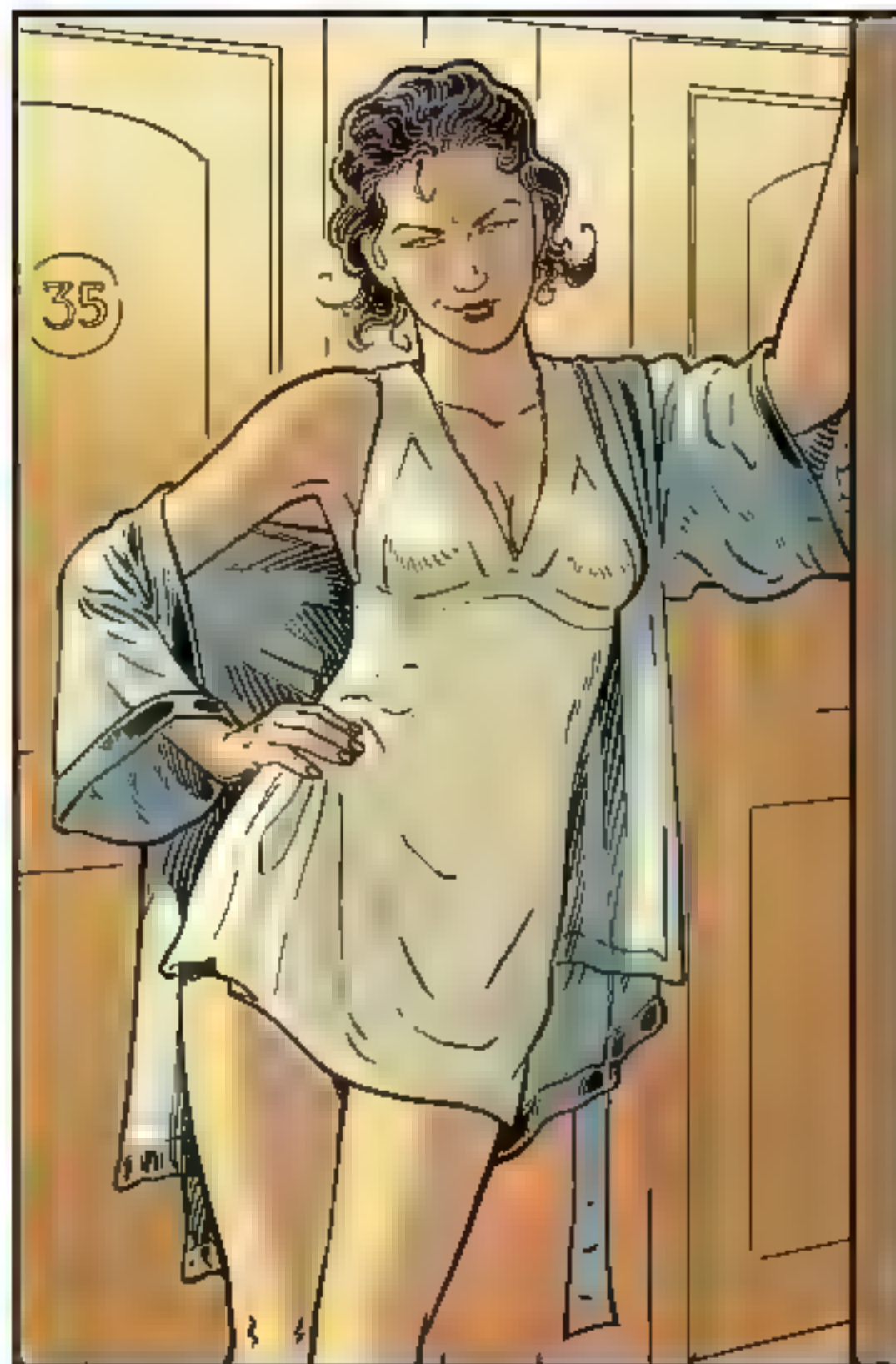


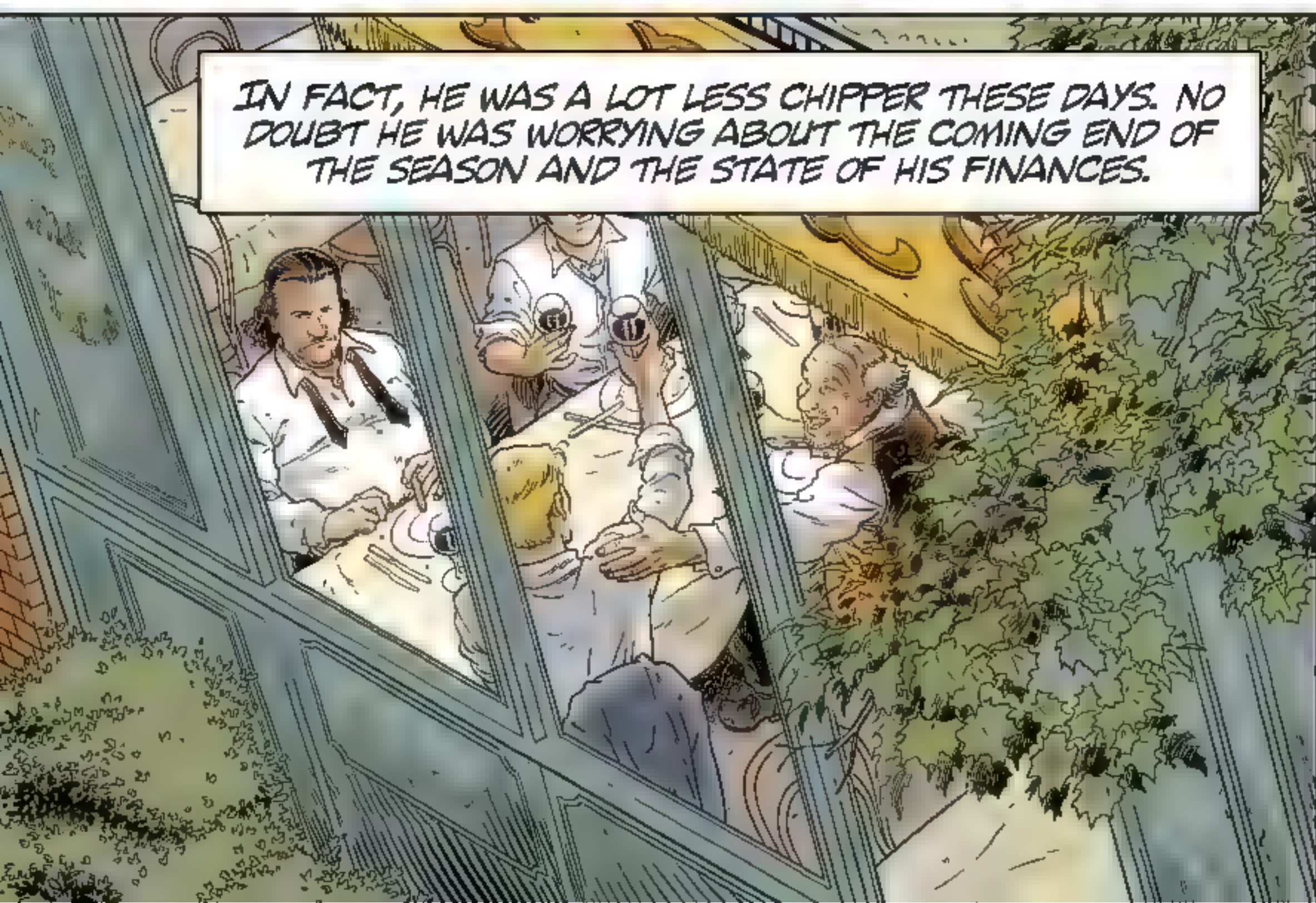
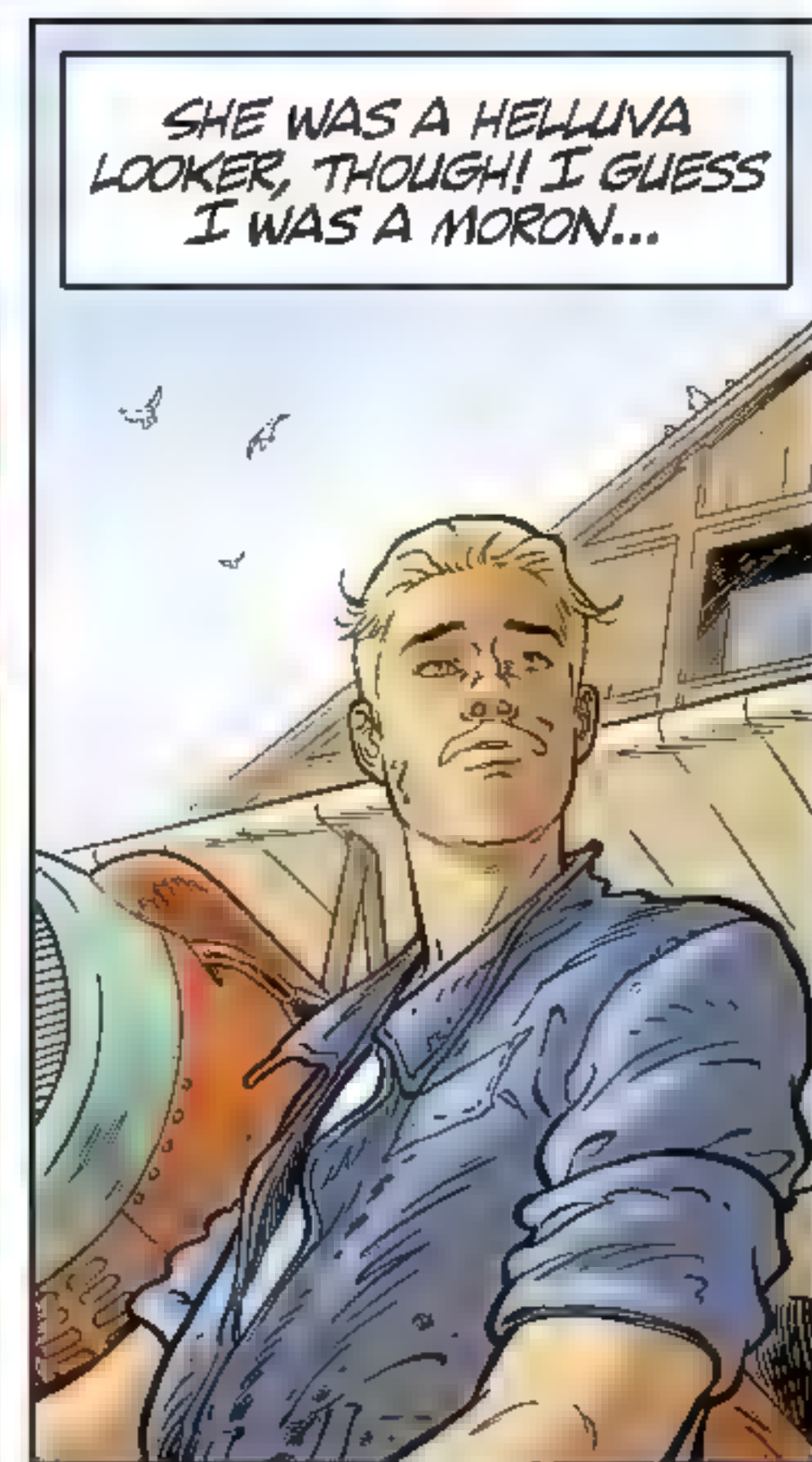
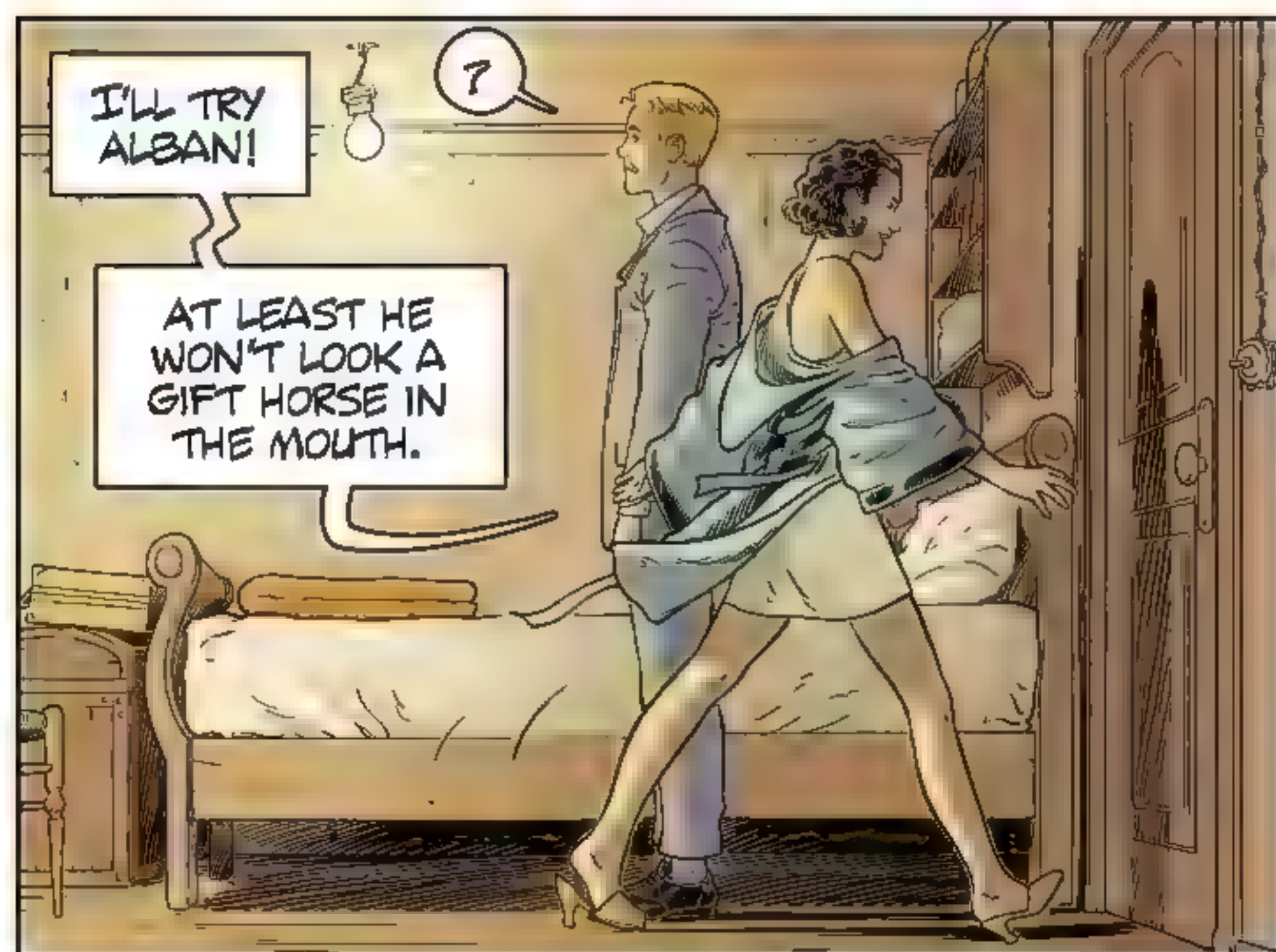
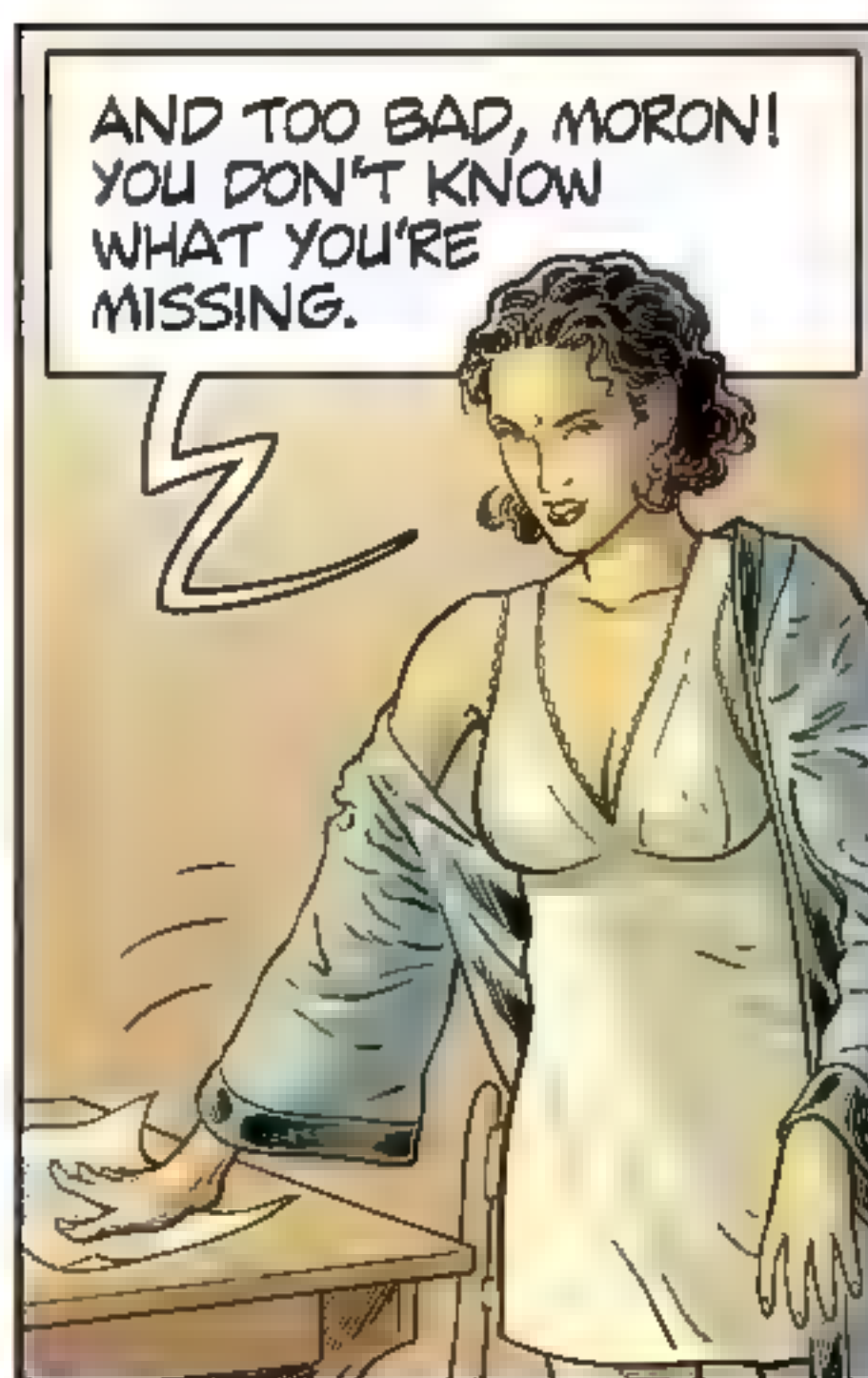
THAT MADE ME A BETTER PROSPECT FOR THE AIRLINES THAT I WAS STILL WRITING TO ALL THE TIME. NEW ROUTES WERE CONSTANTLY OPENING UP: TO LONDON, CENTRAL EUROPE, THE NEAR EAST, MOROCCO, ALGERIA...

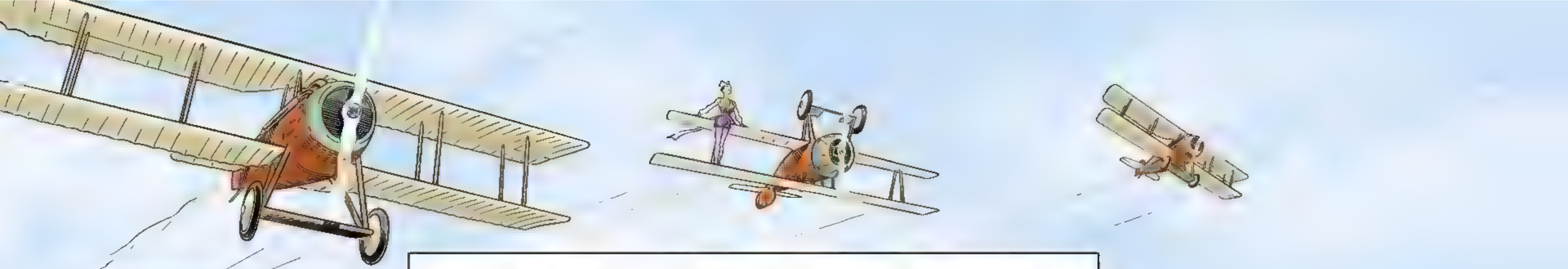




I EVEN WROTE TO THE AIRPLANE MANUFACTURERS. NOW THAT I WAS A STAR PILOT--WELL, LET'S SAY, NOW THAT I KNEW A FEW AEROBATIC TRICKS-- I COULD TEST PLANES FOR THEM.

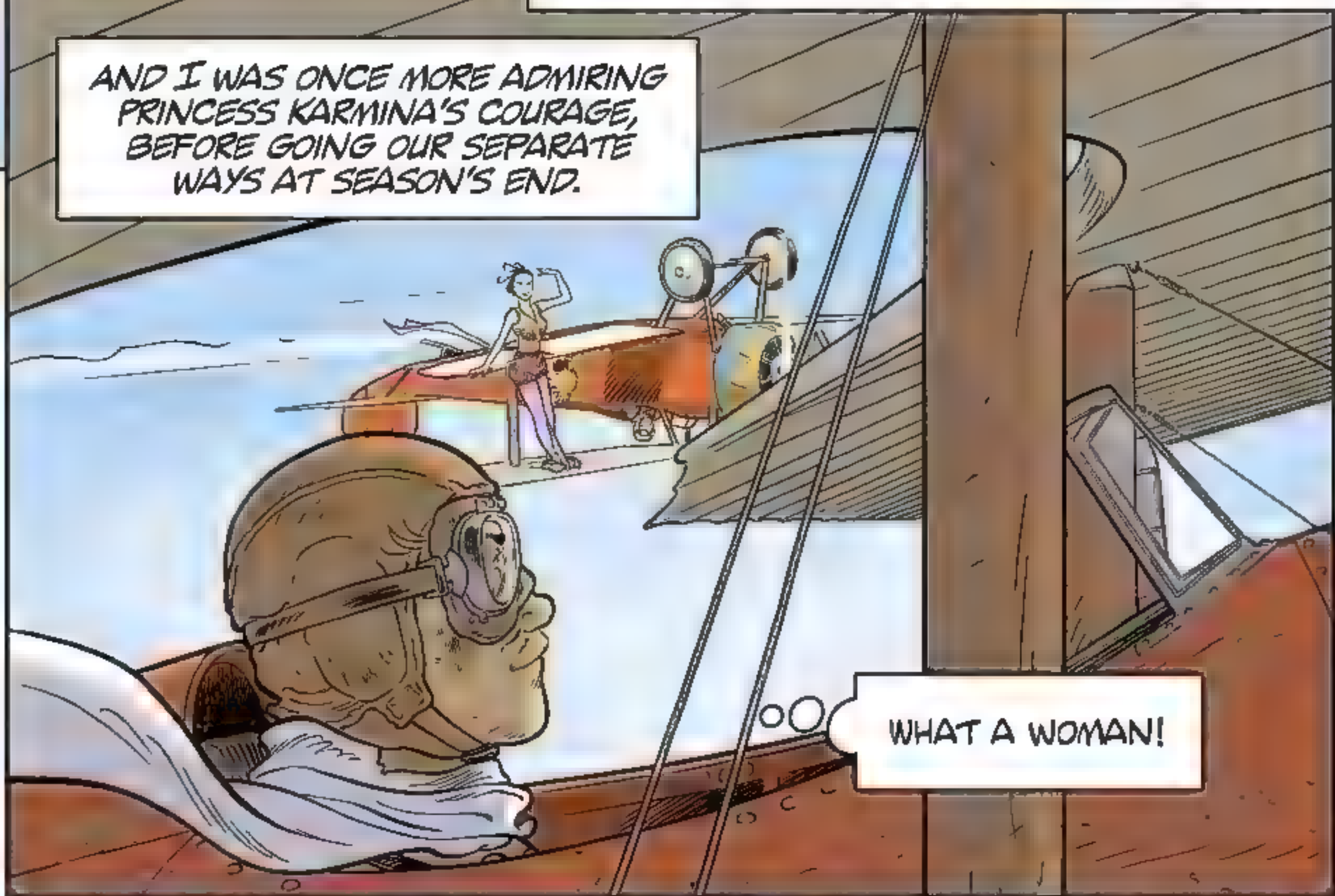




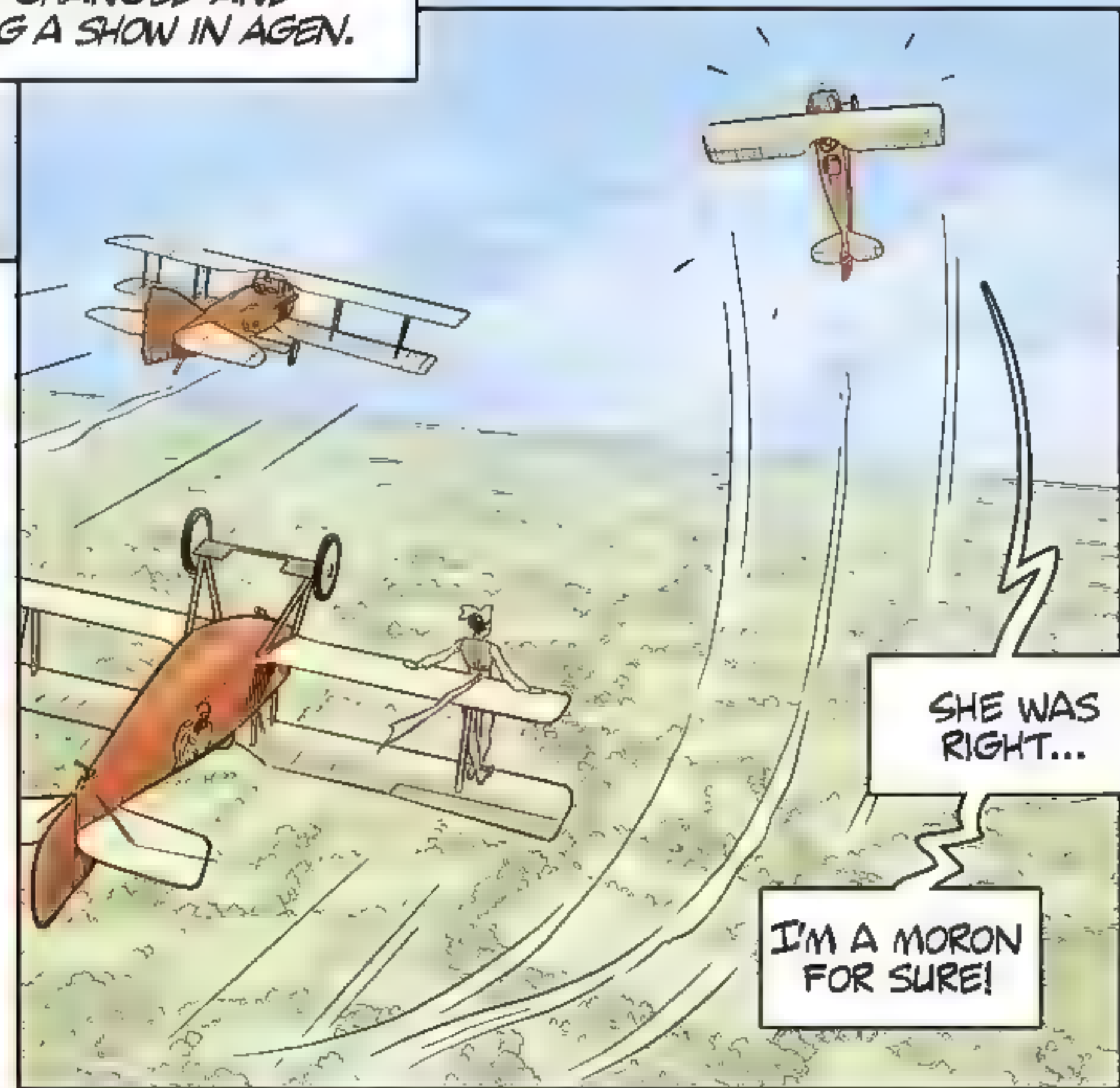


AT THE START OF OCTOBER, THE WEATHER CHANGED AND BOOKINGS BEGAN TO DROP OFF. WE WERE DOING A SHOW IN AGEN.

AND I WAS ONCE MORE ADMIRING PRINCESS KARMINA'S COURAGE, BEFORE GOING OUR SEPARATE WAYS AT SEASON'S END.

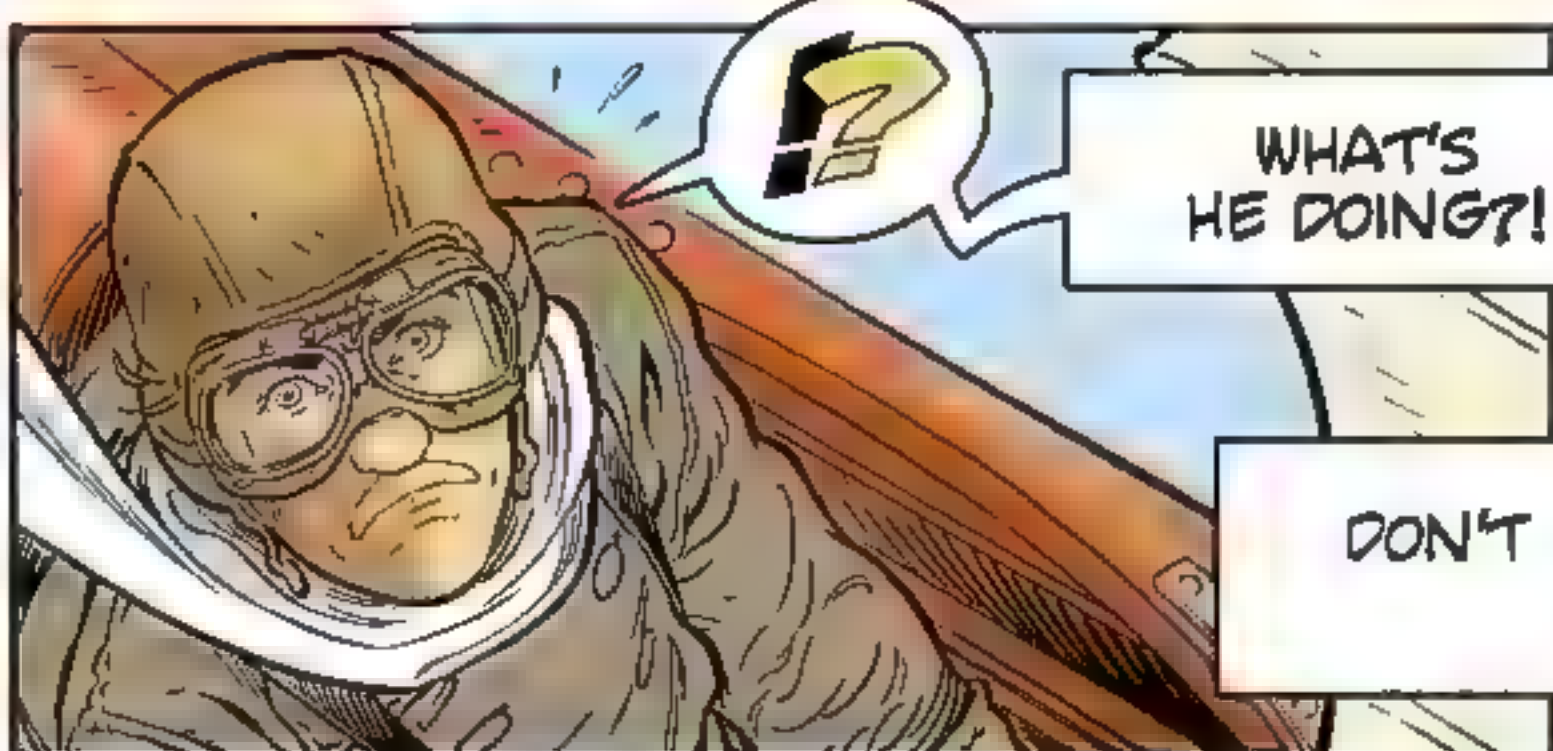


WHAT A WOMAN!



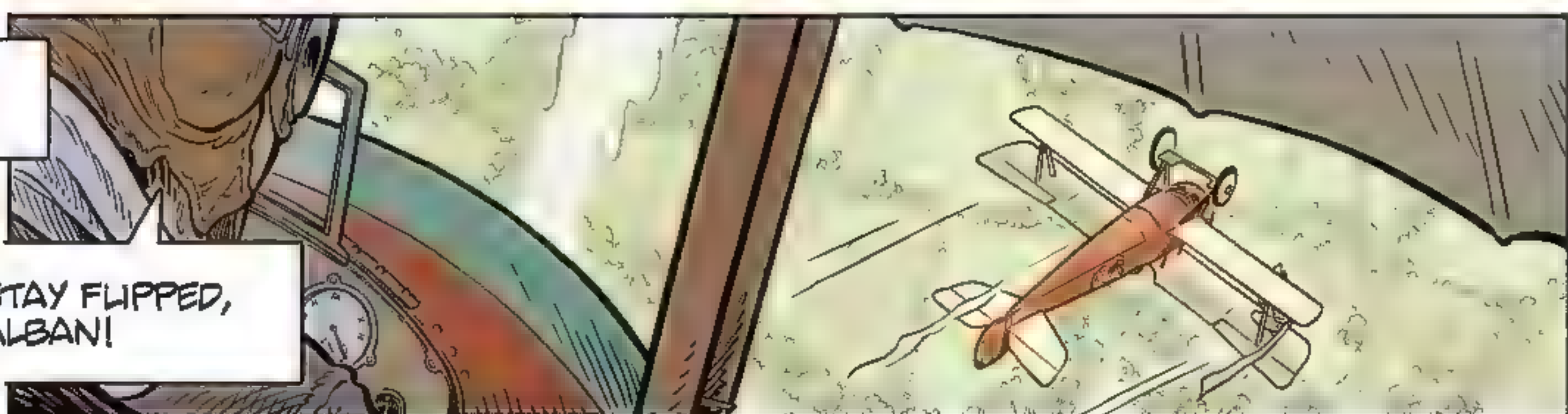
SHE WAS RIGHT...

I'M A MORON FOR SURE!



WHAT'S HE DOING?!

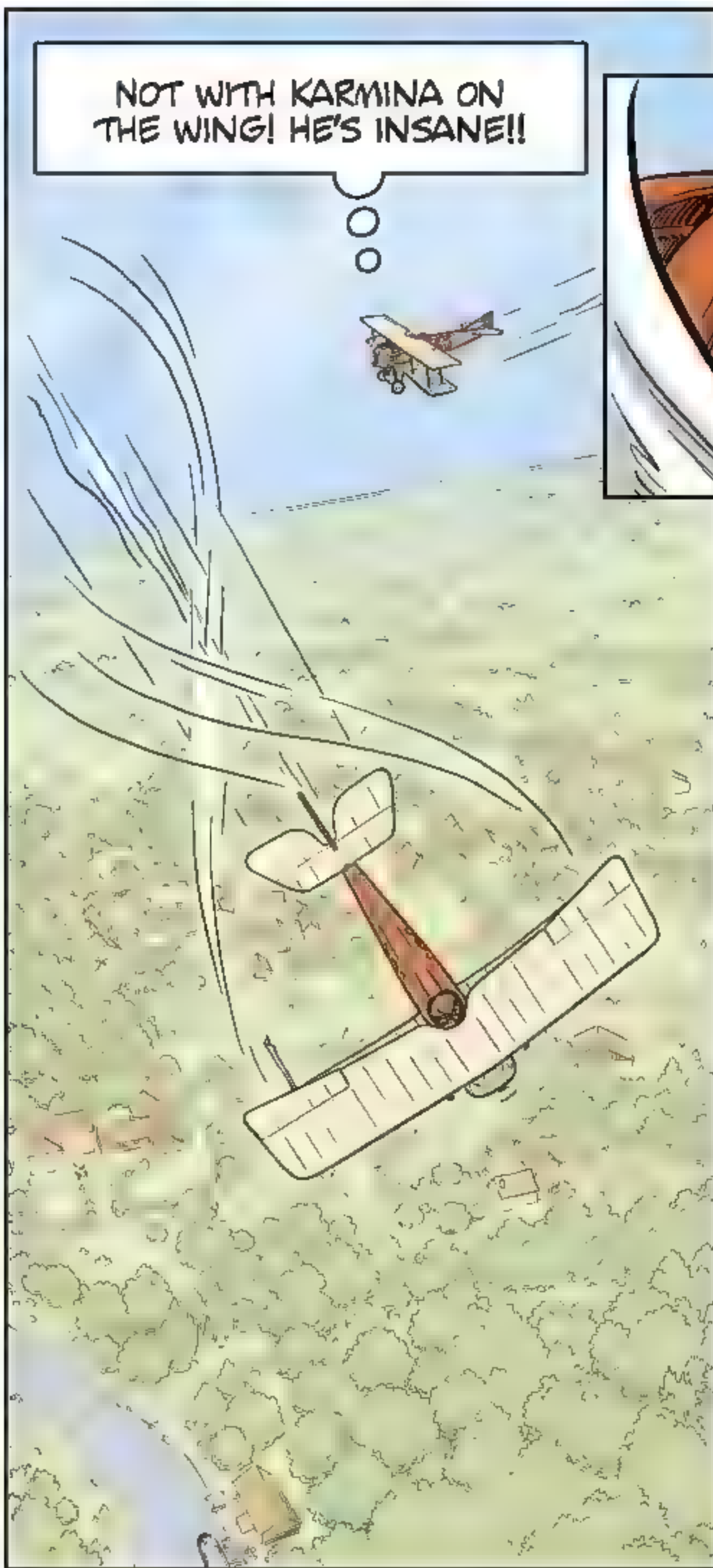
DON'T STAY FLIPPED, ALBAN!



NO! SURELY HE ISN'T TRYING A SPIRAL DIVE?!

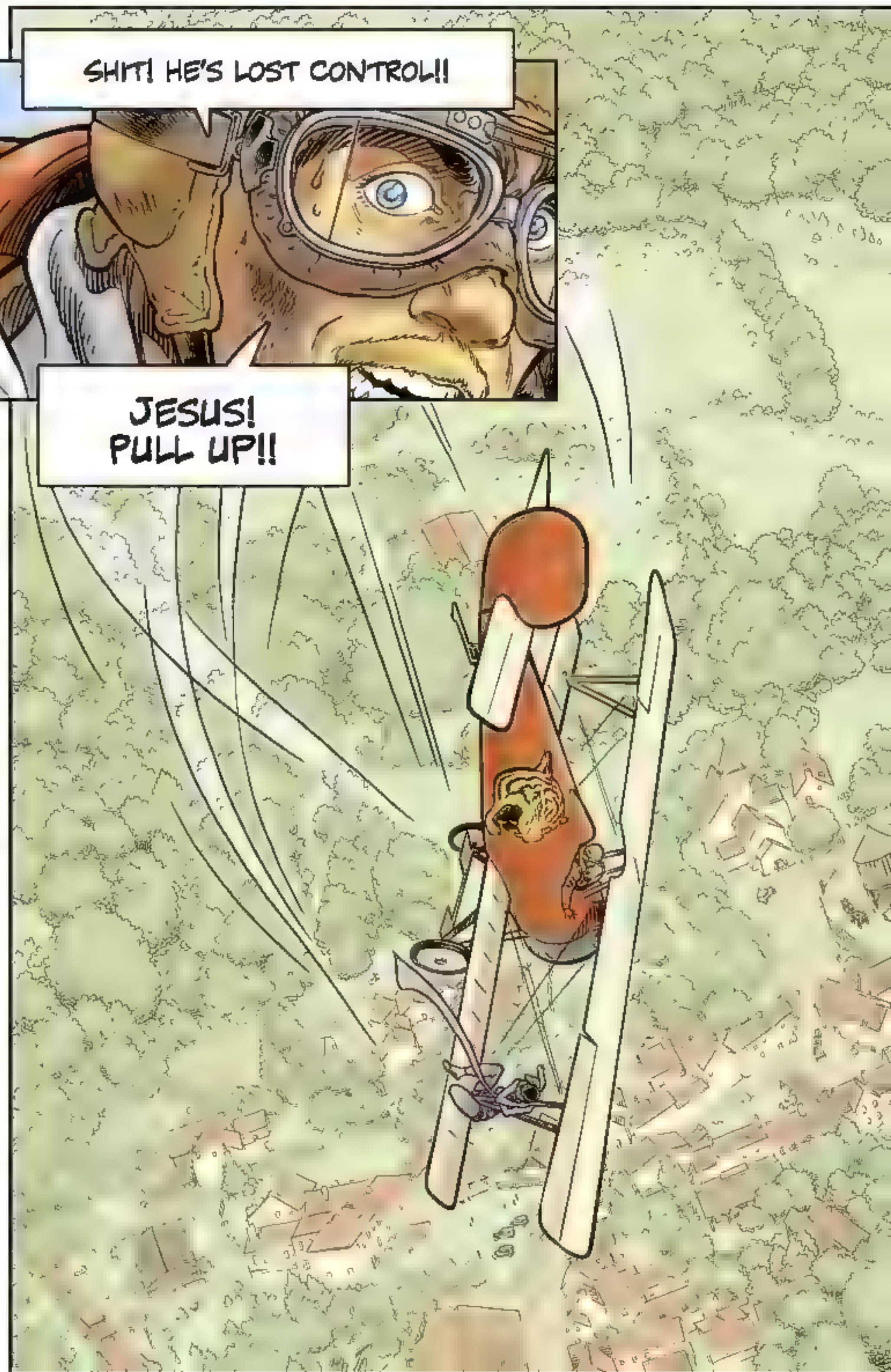
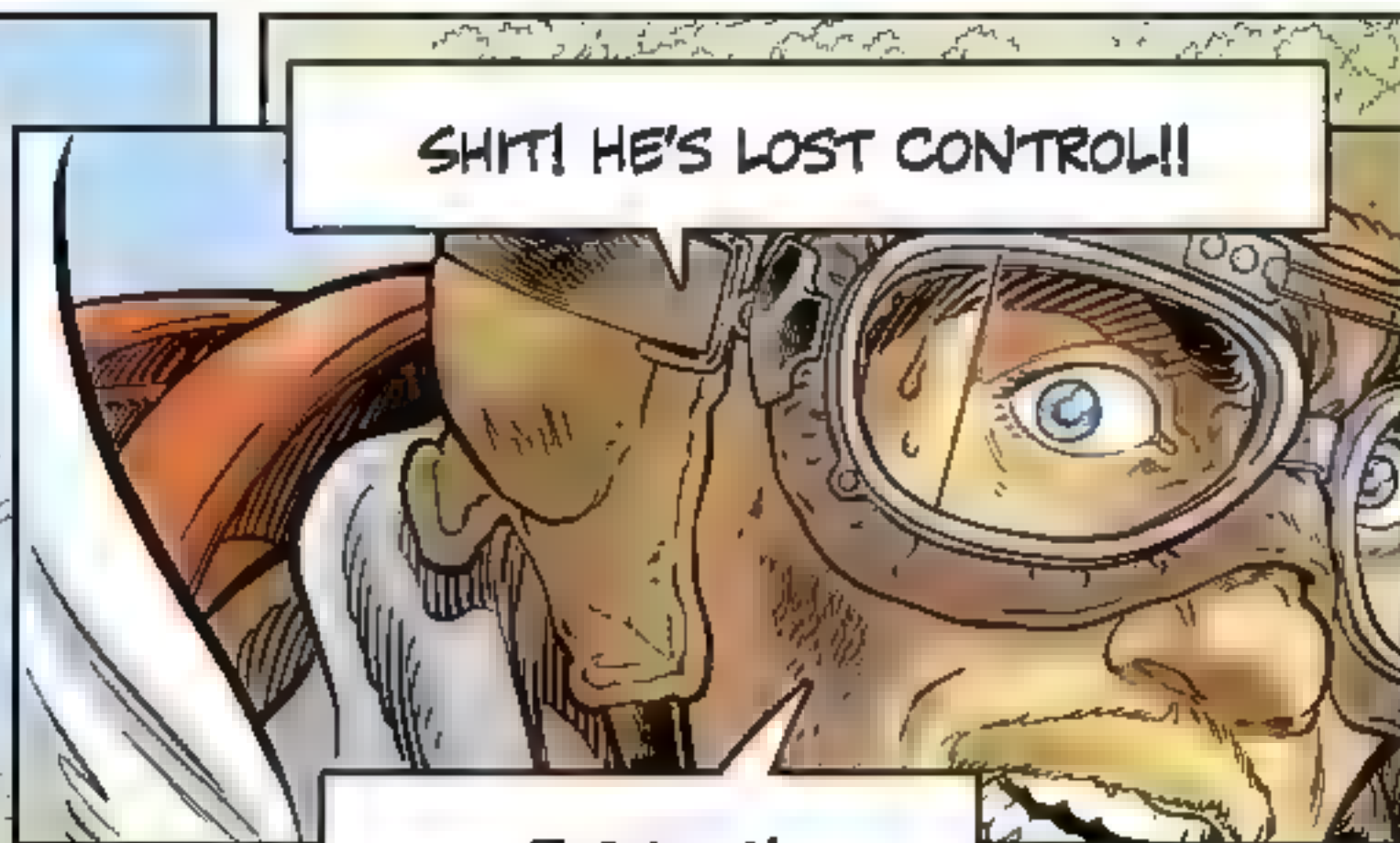


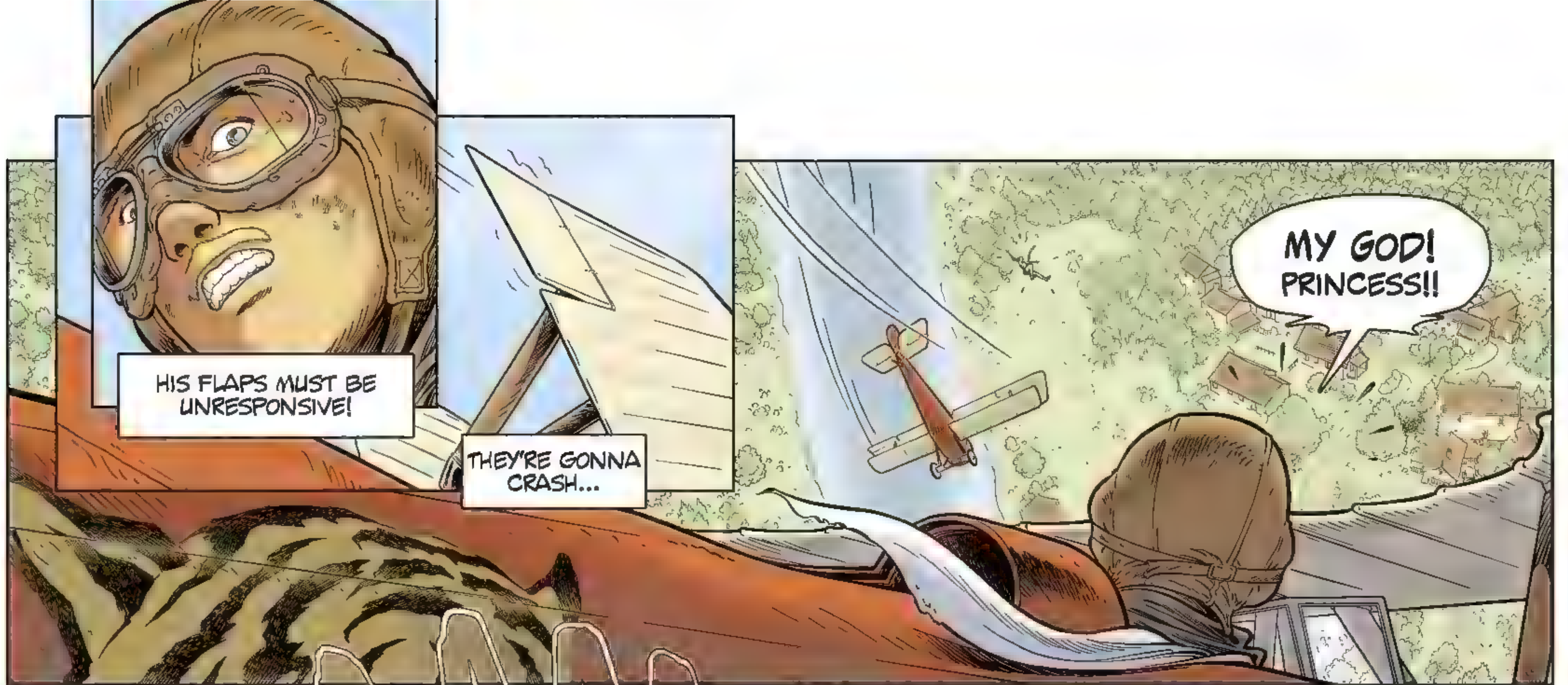
NOT WITH KARMINA ON THE WING! HE'S INSANE!!



SHIT! HE'S LOST CONTROL!!

JESUS! PULL UP!!

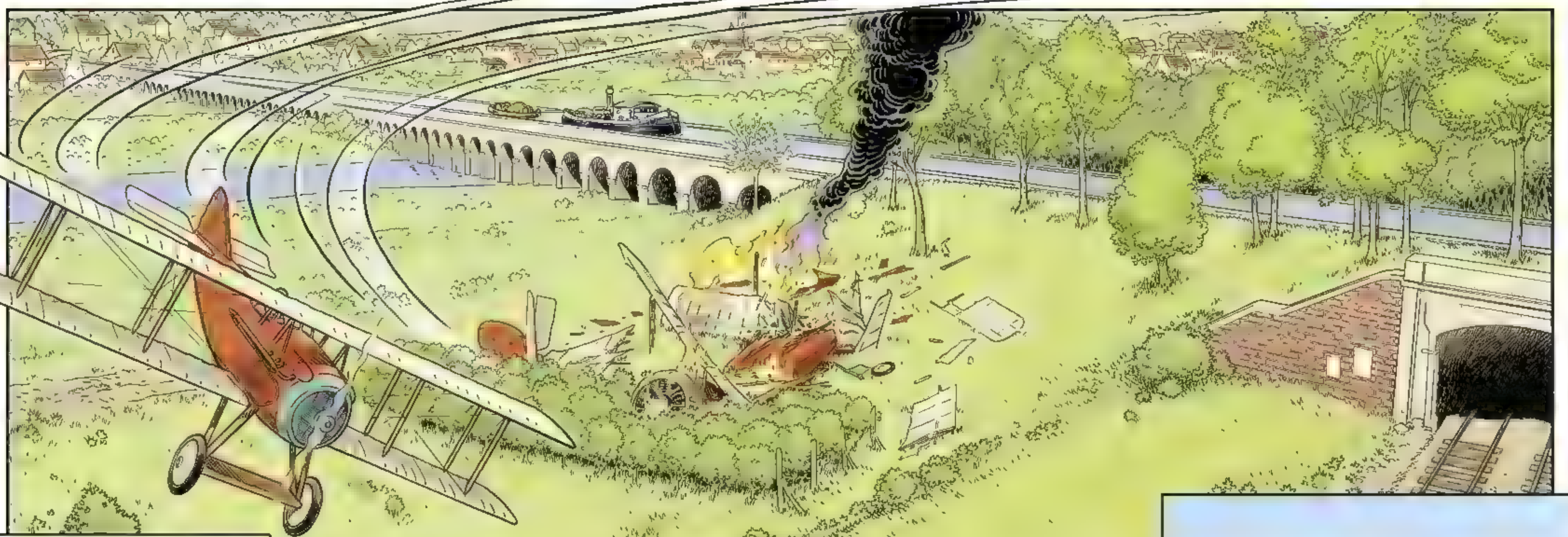
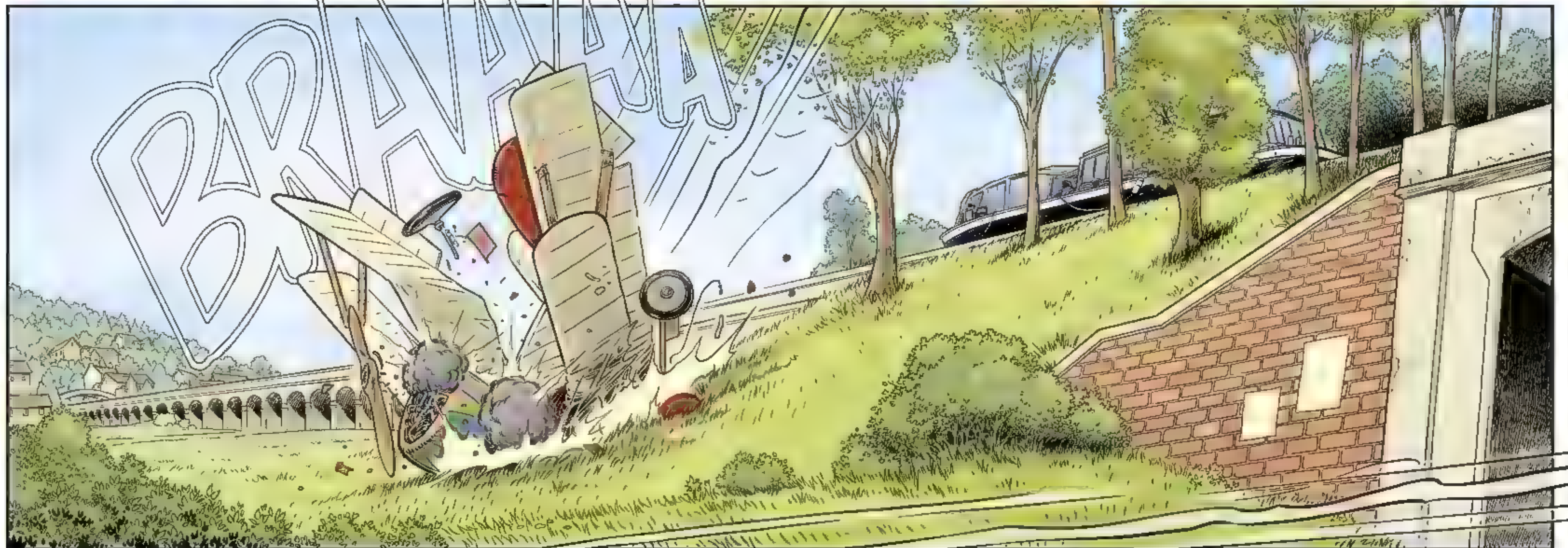




HIS FLAPS MUST BE UNRESPONSIVE!

THEY'RE GONNA CRASH...

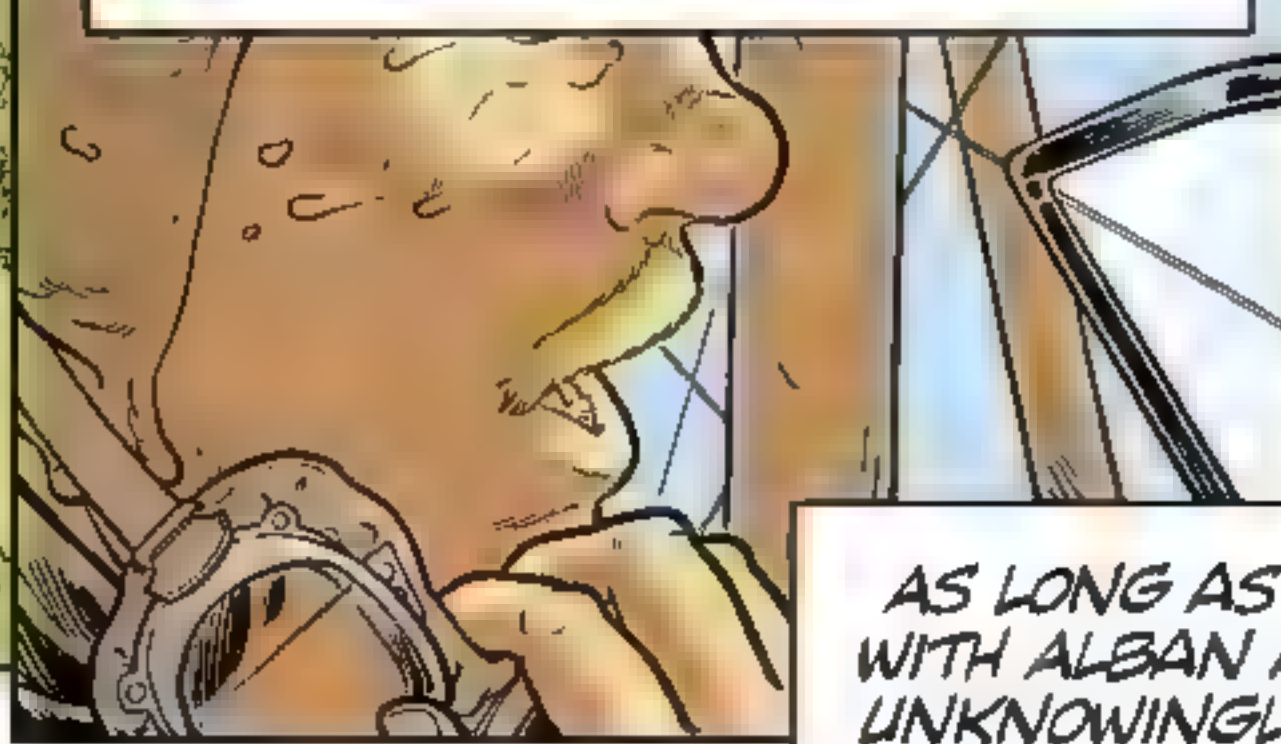
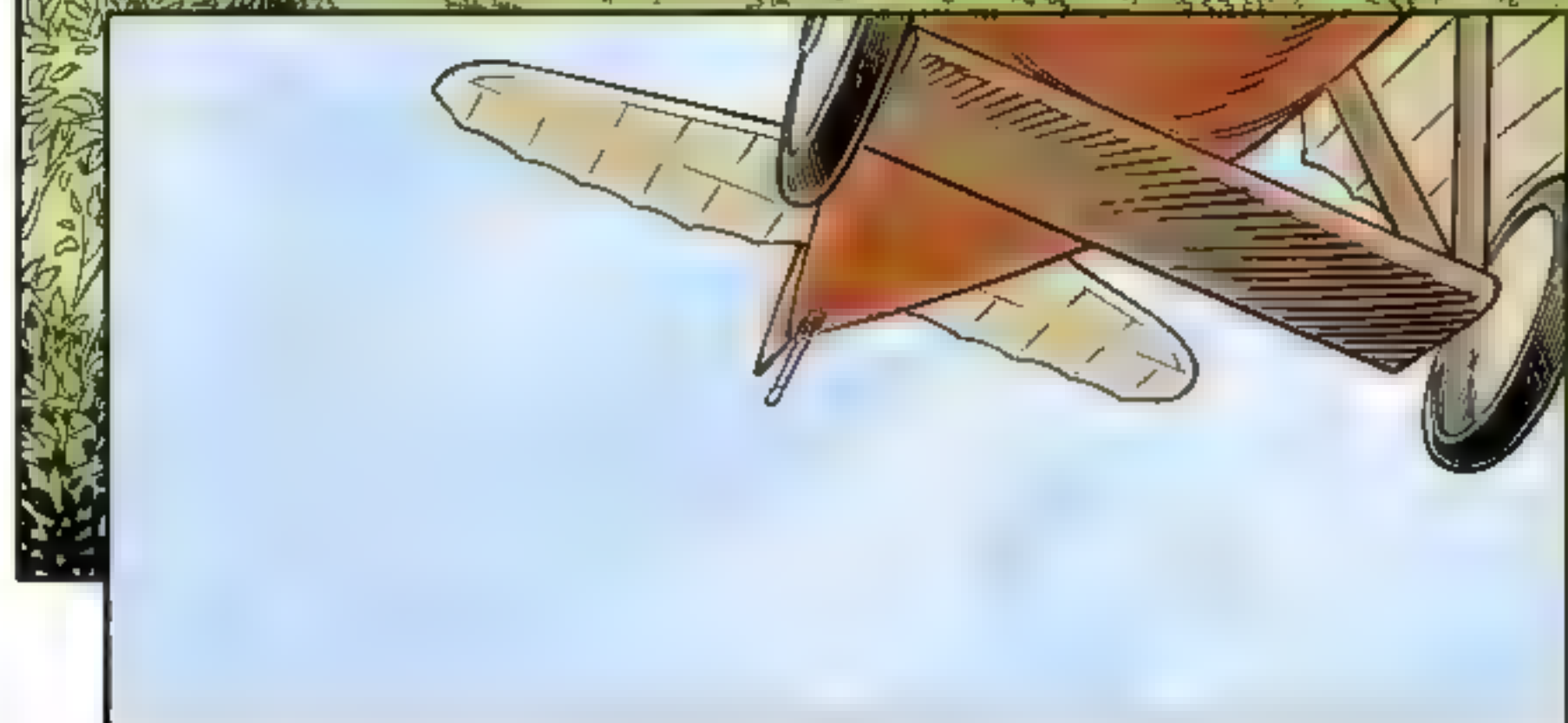
MY GOD!
PRINCESS!!



IT WAS ALL SO
SUDDEN, I COULDN'T
BELIEVE IT HAD
HAPPENED.

I COULDN'T BRING
MYSELF TO LAND...

...AND FACE THE HARD
TRUTH THERE BELOW ME.

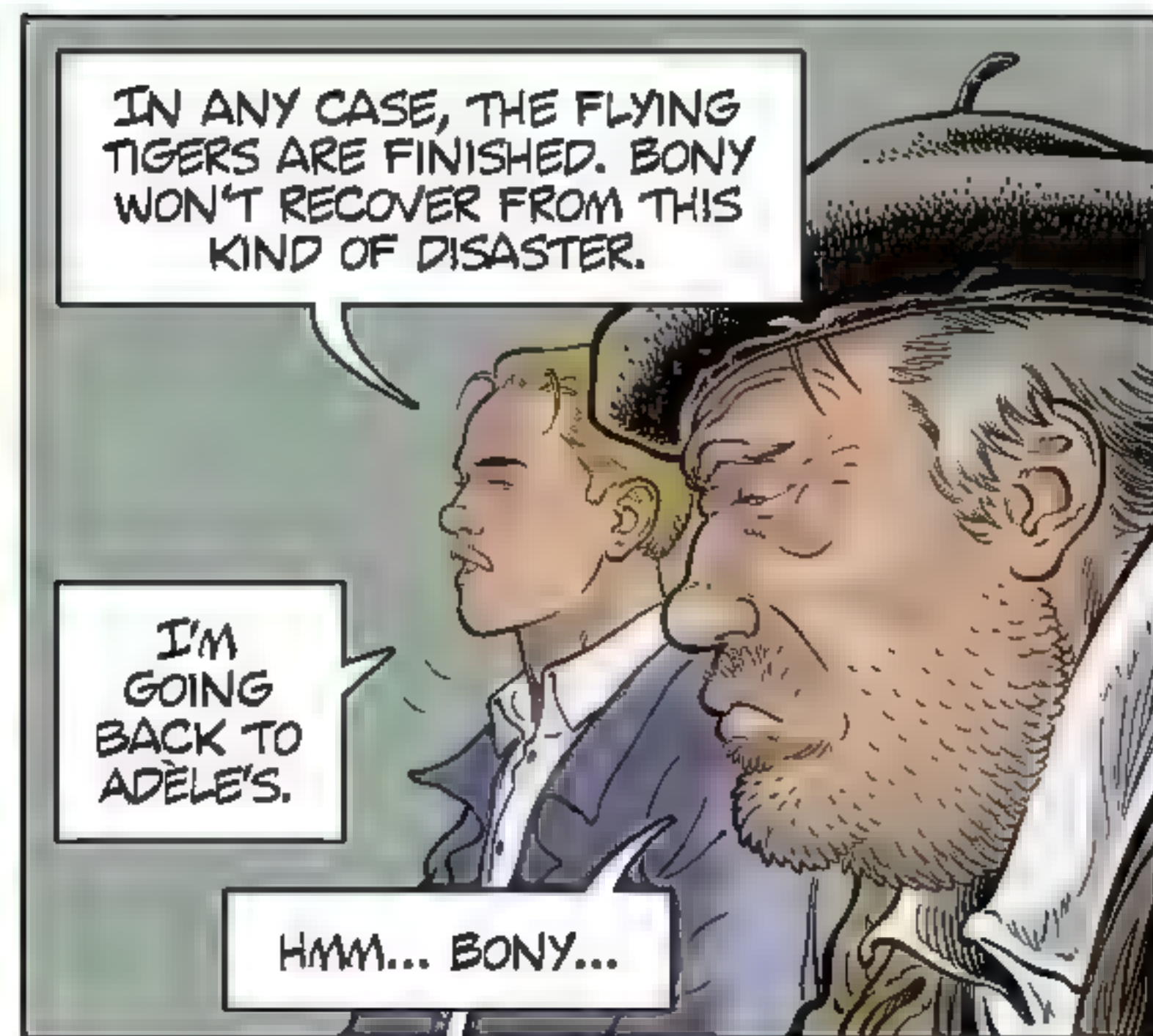
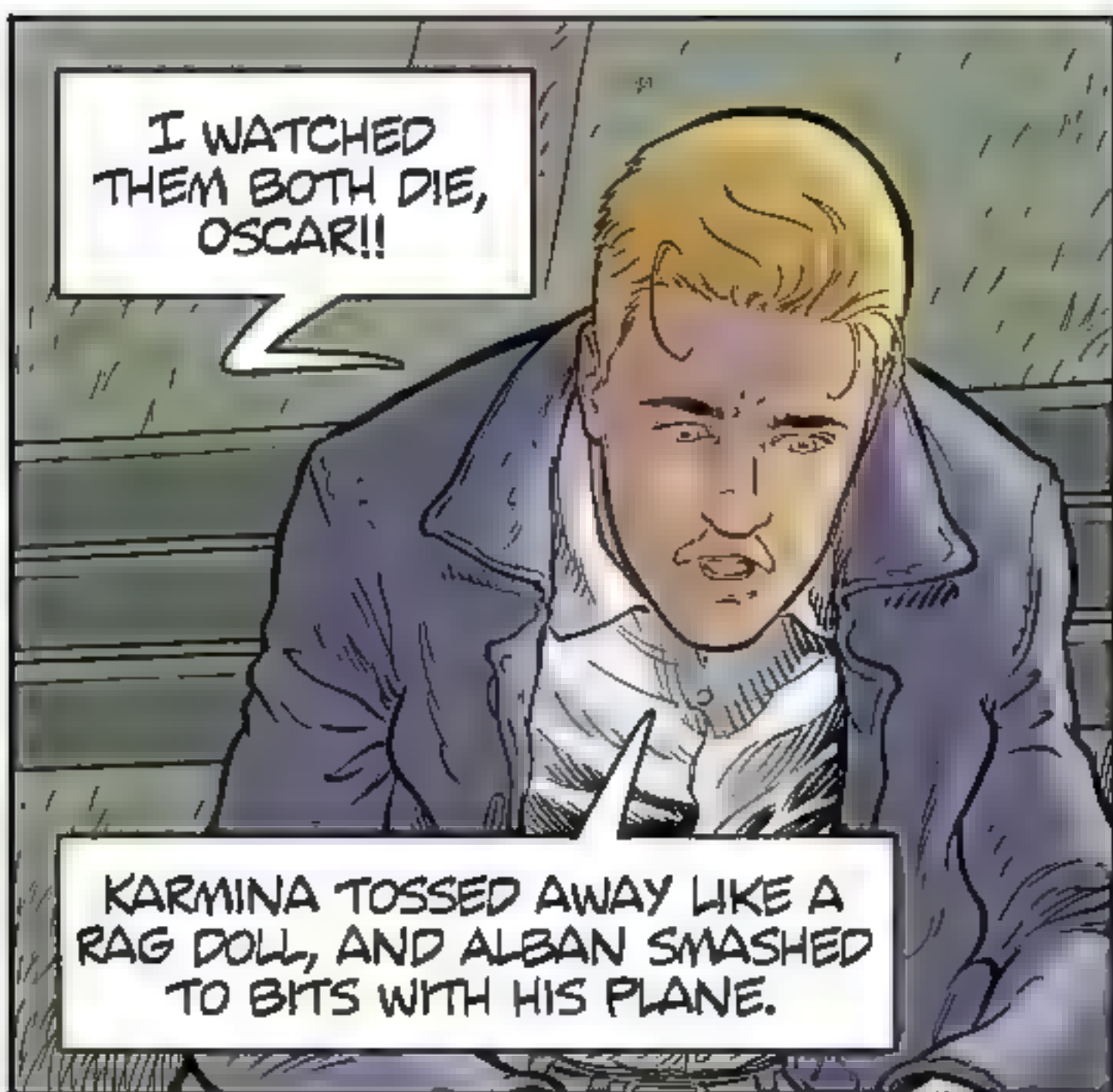
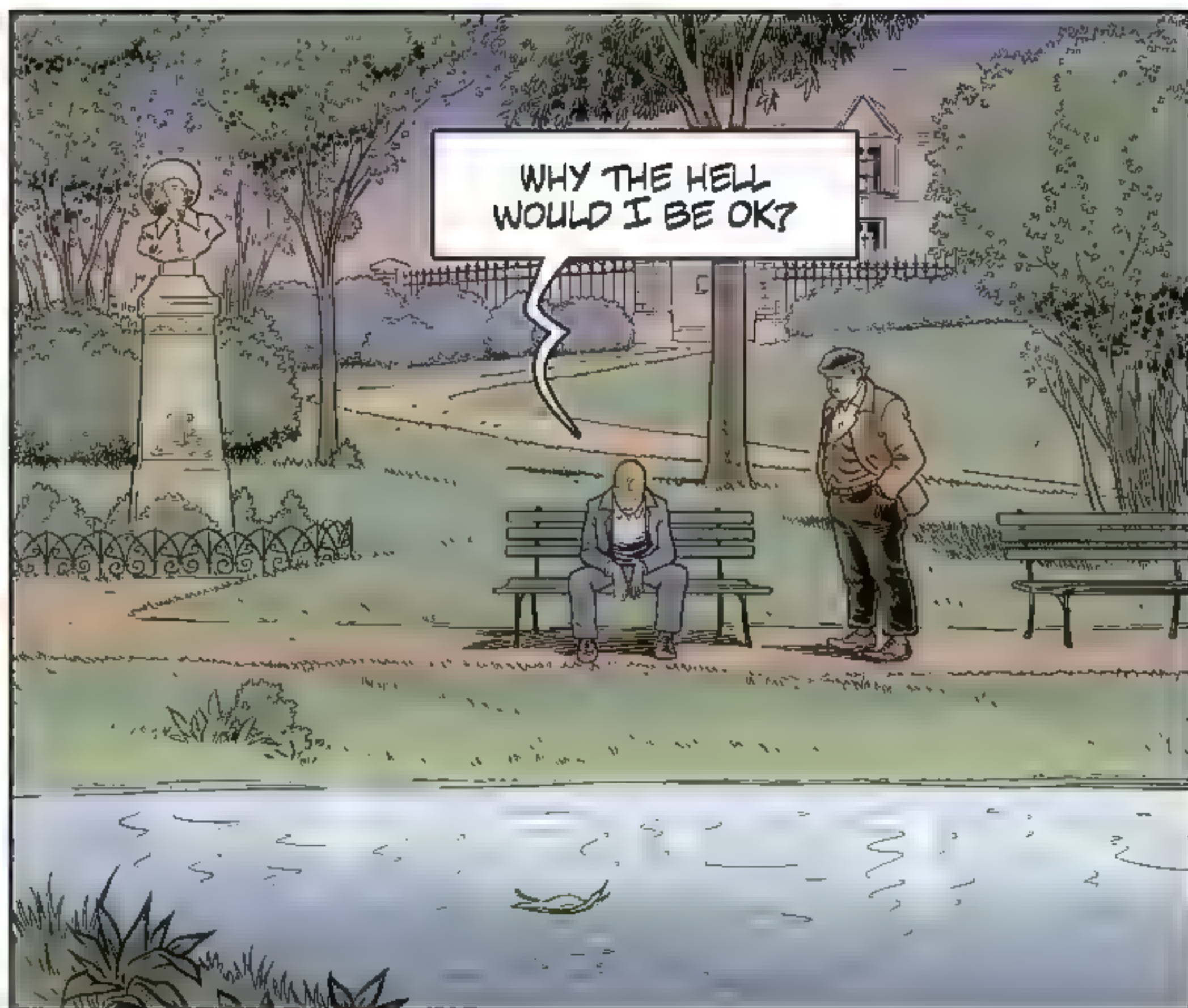
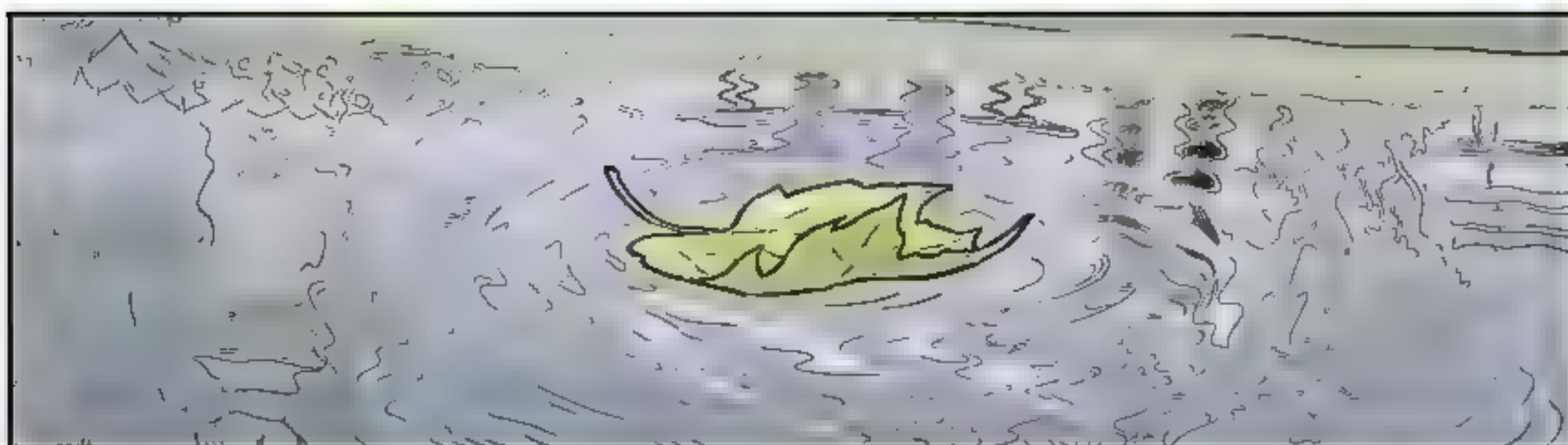
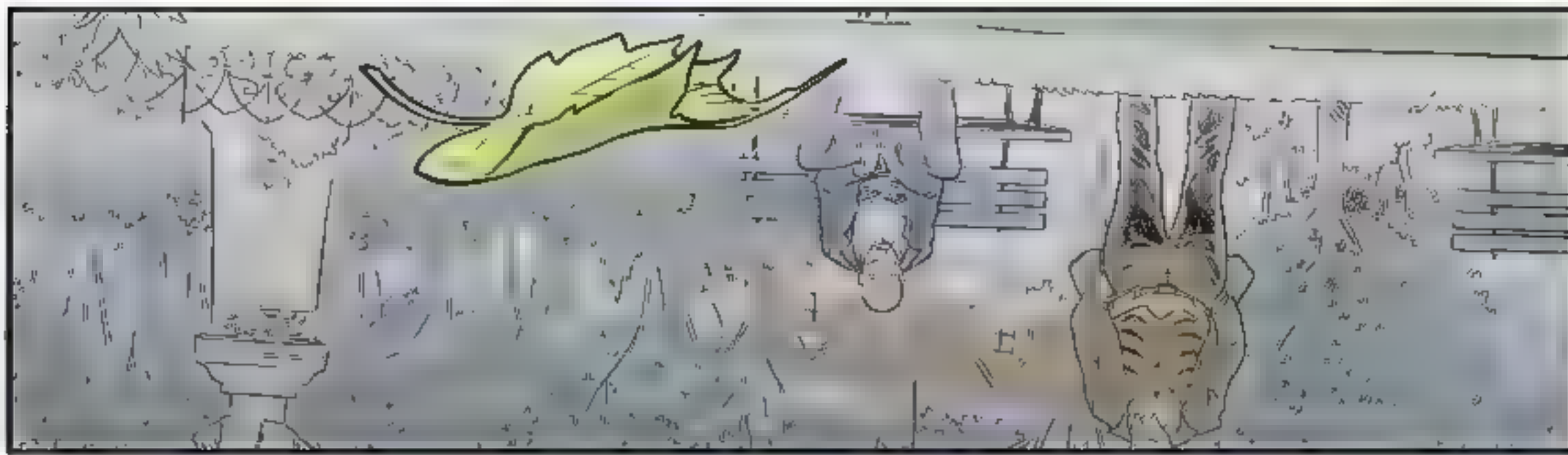


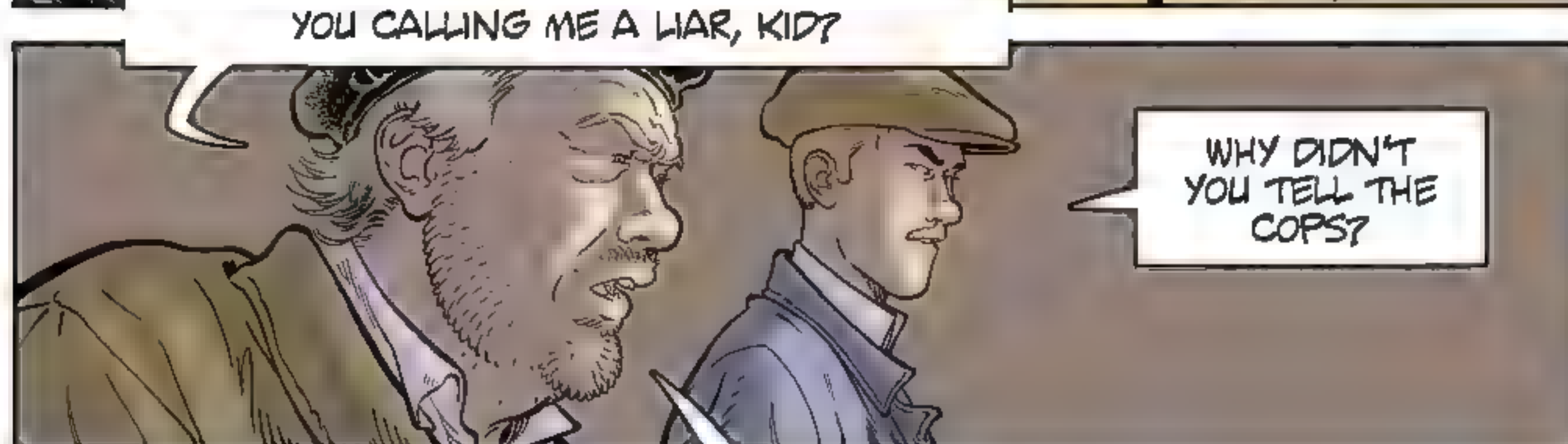
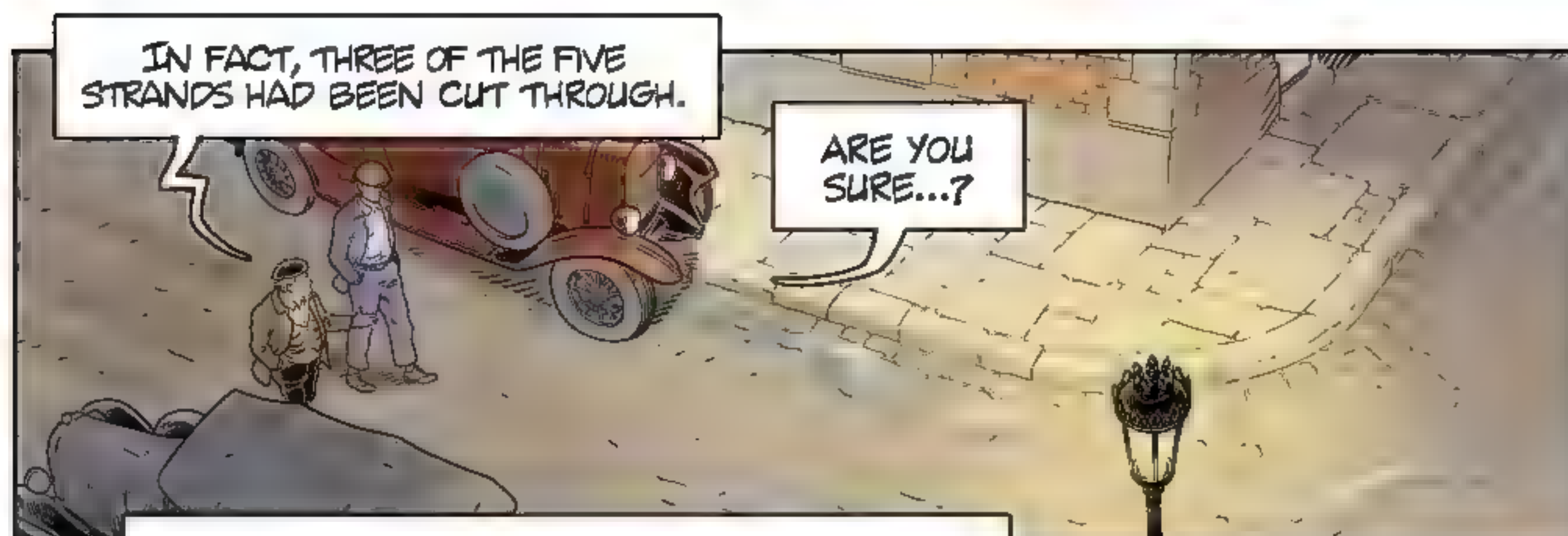
AS LONG AS I WAS IN THE AIR, I WAS STILL
WITH ALBAN AND KARMINA, THE PRINCESS I'D
UNKNOWNLY ADMIRER FOR THE LAST TIME...



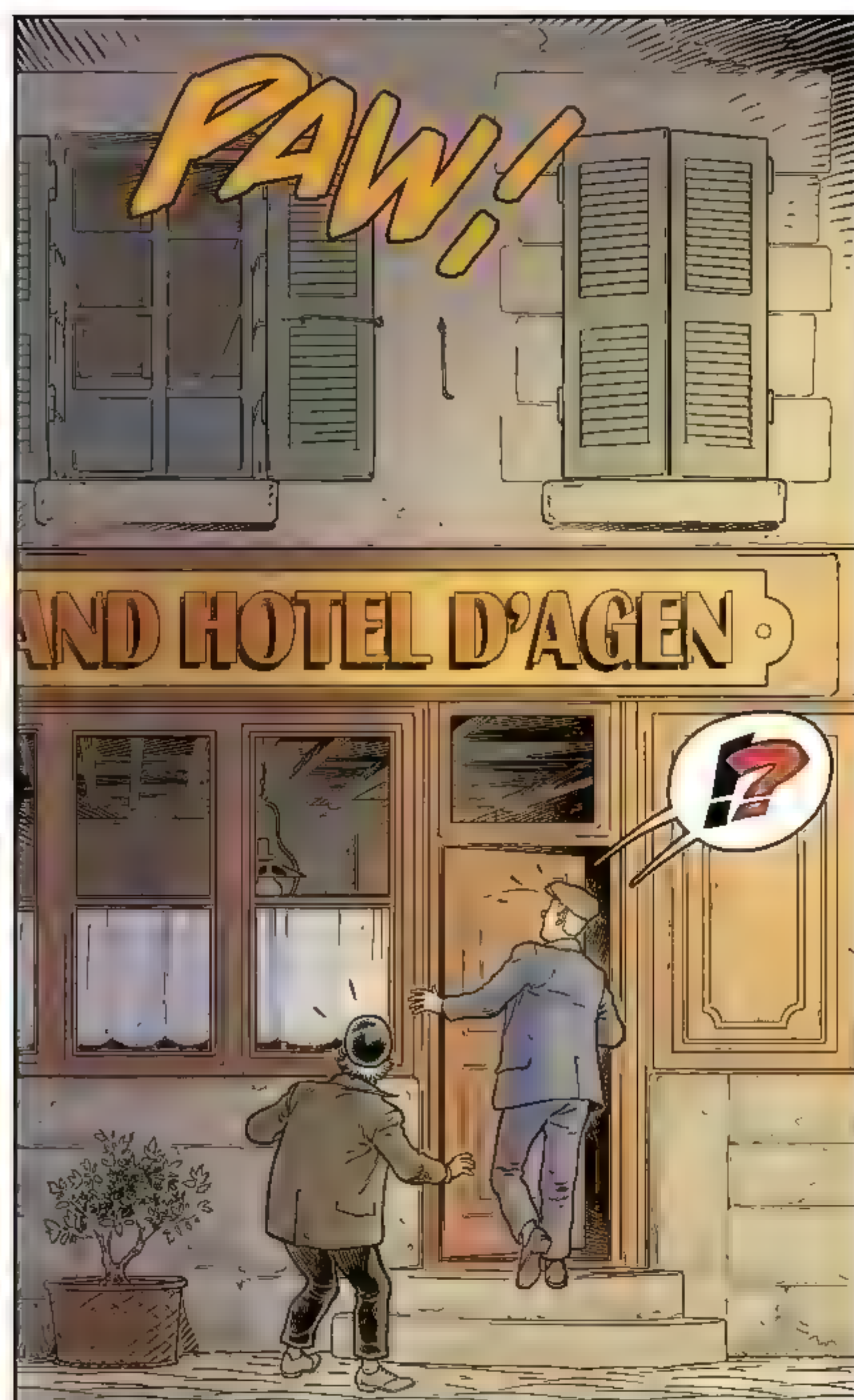


YOU OK, JOE?

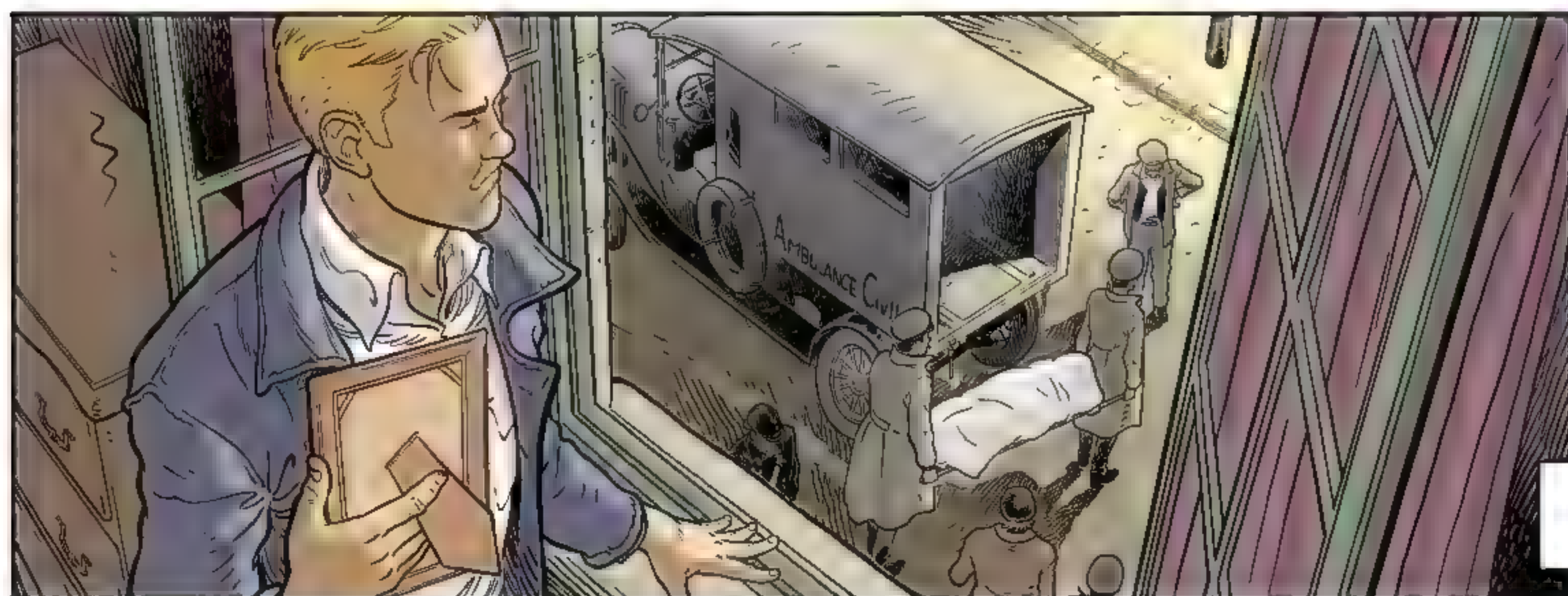




DID YOU SEE THE IDIOTS THEY SENT OVER? THEY DIDN'T WANT TO BE WORKING ON A SUNDAY! THEY WERE ALL TOO HAPPY TO REPORT IT AS AN ACCIDENT.



THE LETTER CONFIRMED EVERYTHING. THAT IT WAS BONY WHO'D SABOTAGED ALBAN'S PLANE. THAT HE'D FOUND OUT THAT KARMINA WAS SLEEPING WITH ALBAN. THAT HE MIGHT HAVE ACCEPTED IT IF SHE HADN'T TOLD HIM THAT SHE AND HER LOVER WERE LEAVING AT THE END OF THE SEASON.



THIS DOUBLE TRAGEDY HIT ME SO HARD THAT I SPENT THE WHOLE OF THE NEXT DAY DRIFTING AROUND IN A KIND OF BLACK FOG--A DEPRESSIVE STATE THAT I KNEW I NEEDED TO GET OUT OF FAST...

...ESPECIALLY AT AN AGE WHEN MY FUTURE SHOULD'VE BEEN DRIVEN BY HOPES AND DREAMS.

TOULOUSE IS ONLY FIFTY MILES FROM HERE, JOE!

BECAUSE THE LATÉCOÈRE AIRMAIL SERVICE IS BASED THERE. (1)

I KNOW THAT. I WROTE TO THEM, BUT THEY NEVER BOTHERED TO REPLY.

WHY ARE YOU TELLING ME THAT?

IT WAS OSCAR WHO GOT ME BACK ON THE ROAD TO BECOMING A PILOT.

WELL, KID, I'M GONNA GO SEE THEM WITHOUT WRITING FIRST! THEY NEED MECHANICS FOR THEIR STATIONS IN AFRICA.

FORTUNE'S A FLIGHTY DAME, KID, AND SOMETIMES YOU'VE GOT TO TWIST HER ARM!

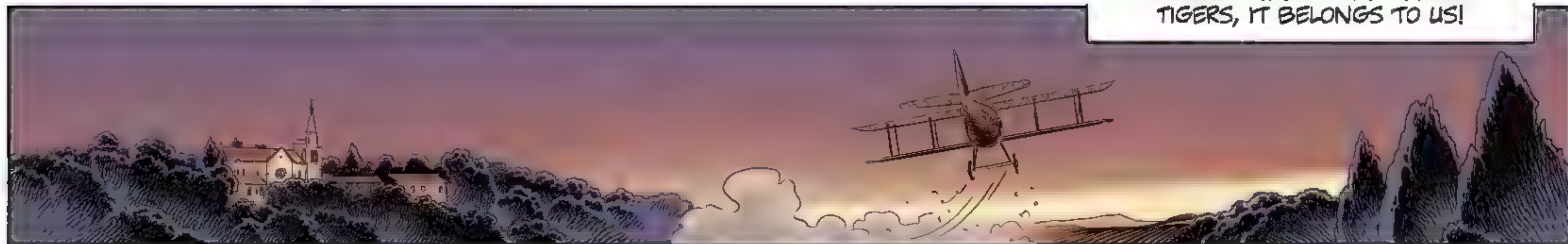
I'VE PACKED YOU A BAG. WE'LL SLEEP HERE AND LEAVE AT DAYBREAK. WITH THE SPAD, WE'LL BE THERE BY THE TIME THEY OPEN.

BUT...

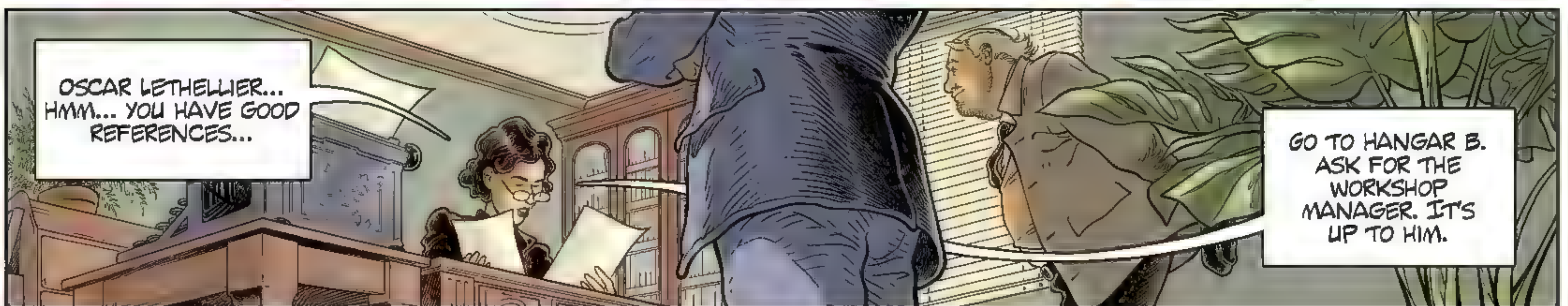
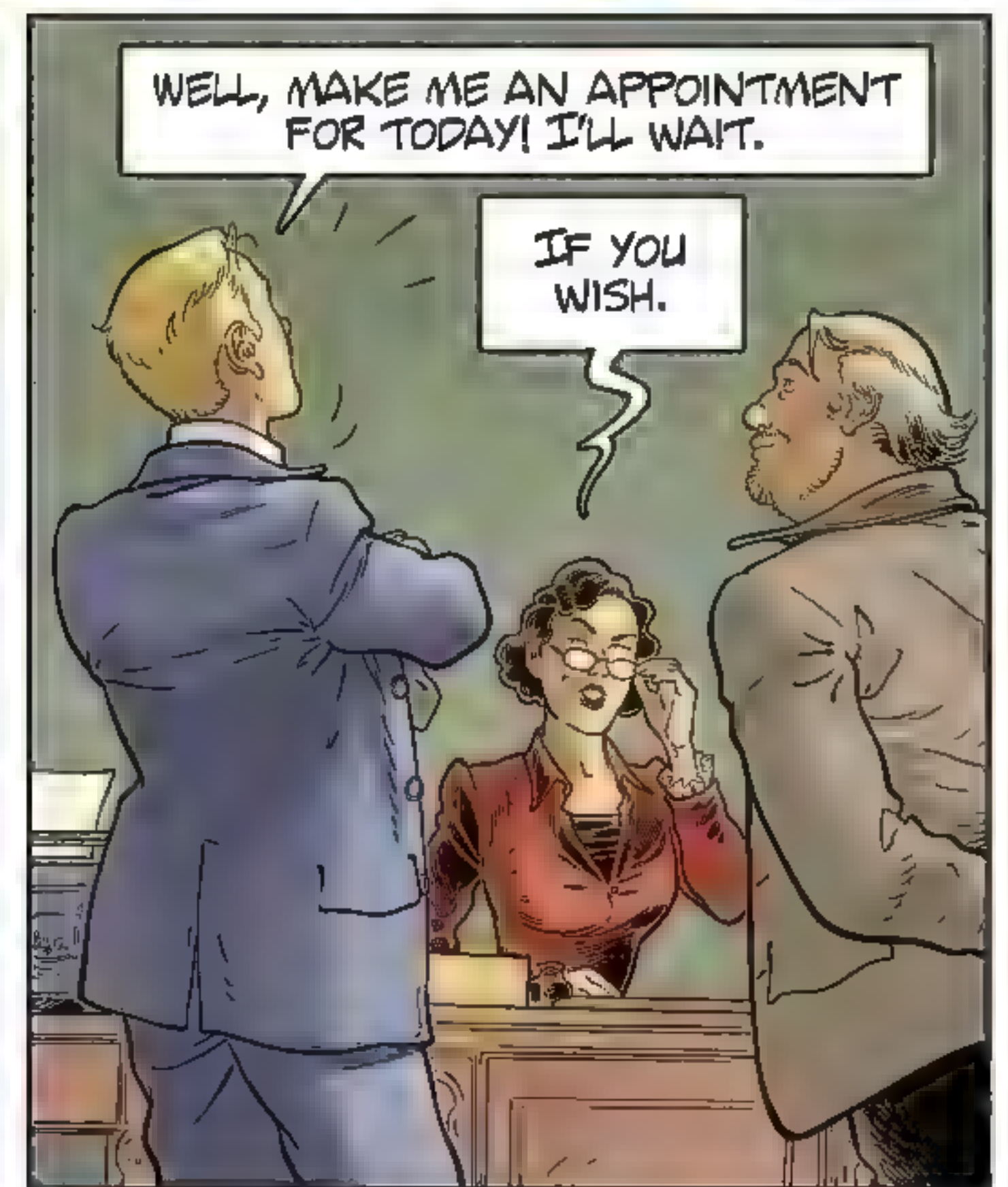
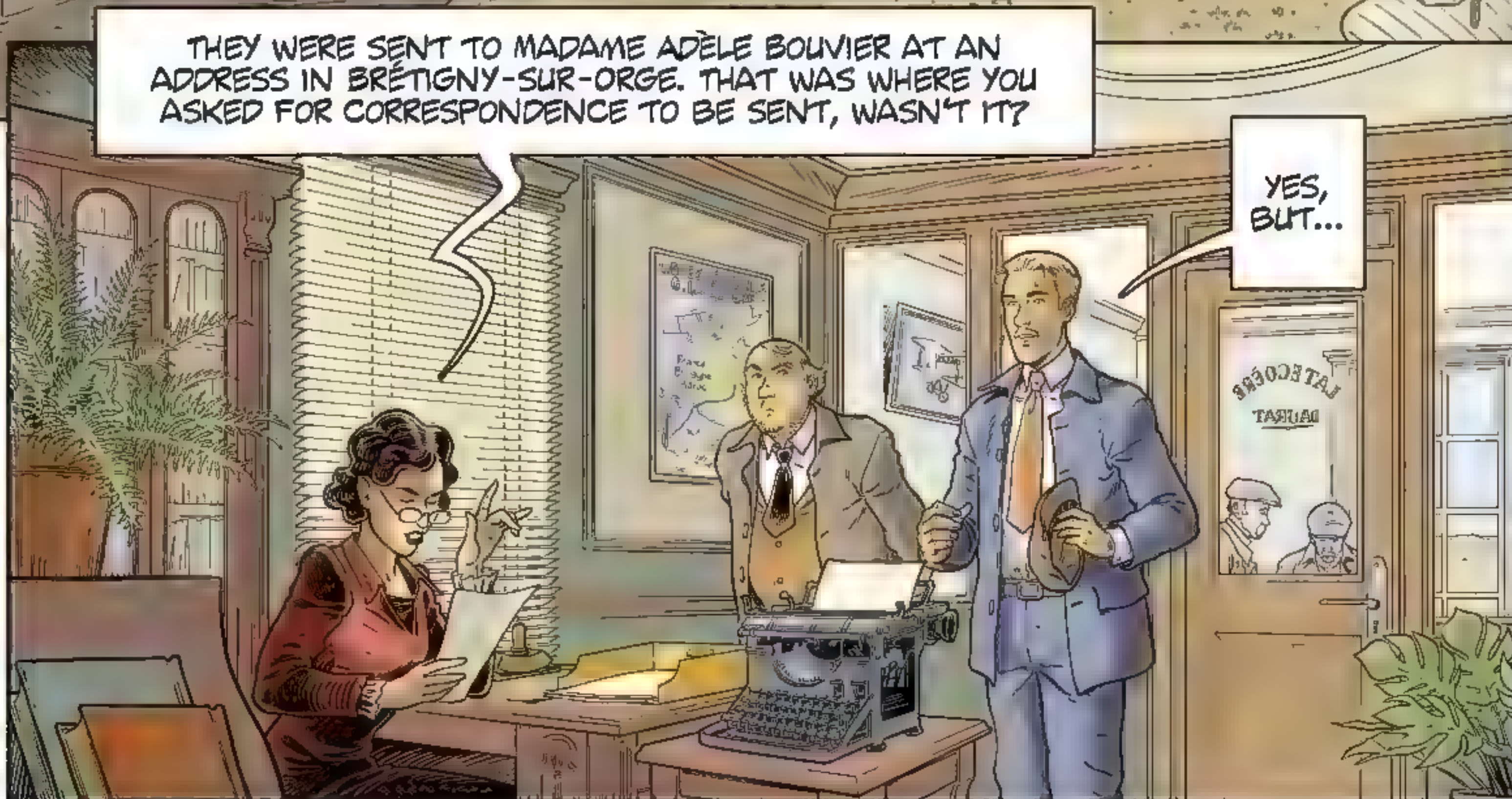
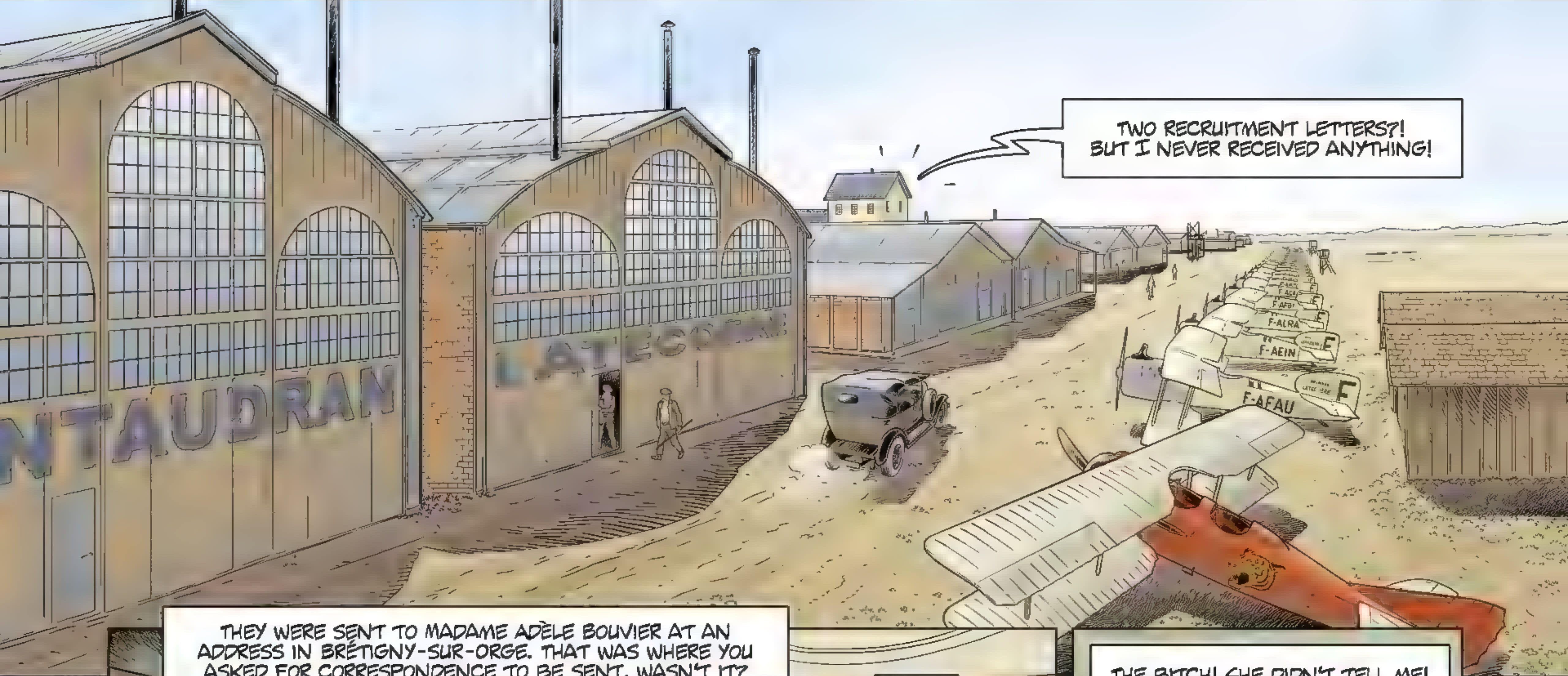
...IT BELONGS TO BONY!

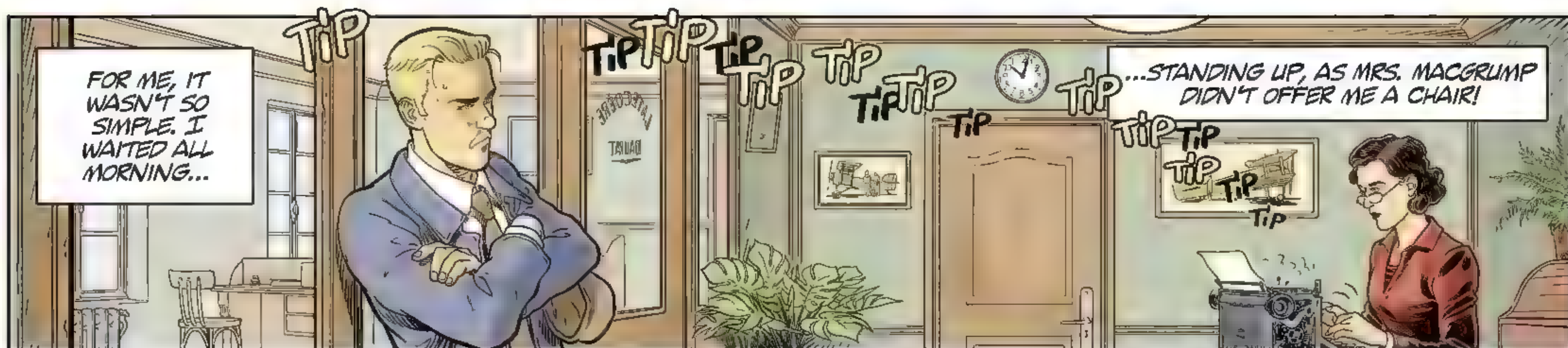
YOU THINK HE'LL REPORT US?

UNTIL THEY WORK OUT WHO'S GONNA INHERIT THE FLYING TIGERS, IT BELONGS TO US!



(1) AT NEARBY MONTAUDRAN.

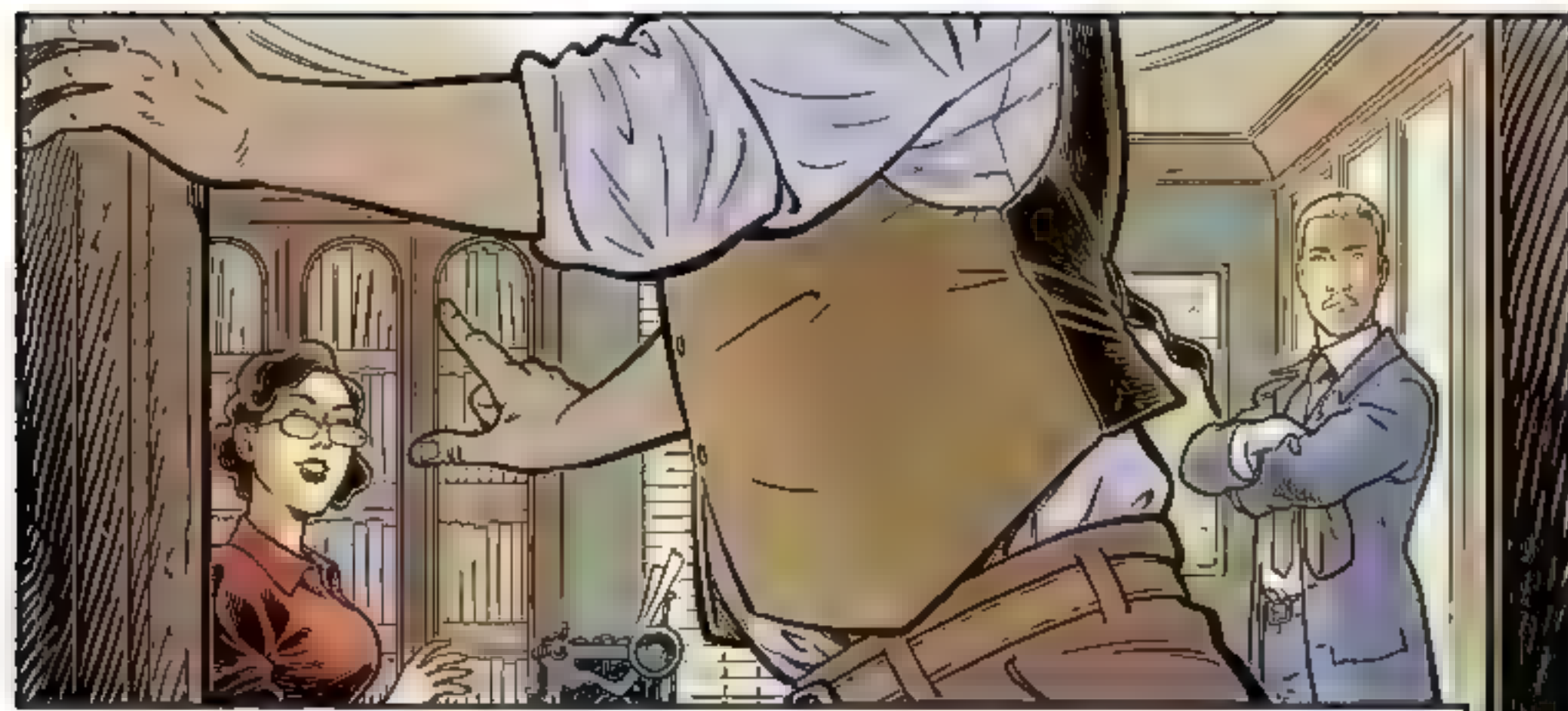




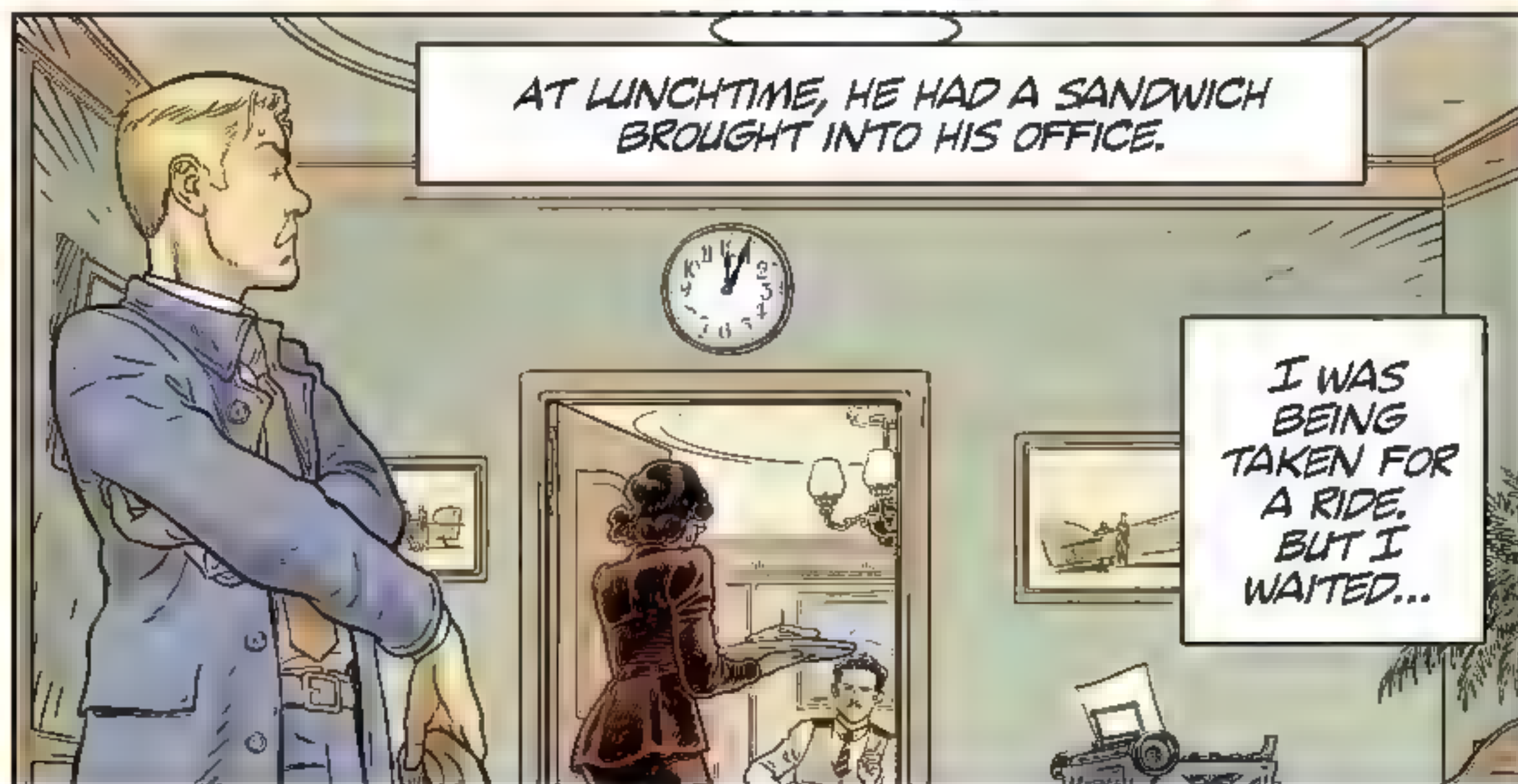
FOR ME, IT WASN'T SO SIMPLE. I WAITED ALL MORNING...

...STANDING UP, AS MRS. MACGRUMP DIDN'T OFFER ME A CHAIR!

A GUY I ASSUMED TO BE MR. DAURAT CAME INTO THE ROOM SEVERAL TIMES AND TOTALLY IGNORED ME... AND HE DIDN'T LOOK LIKE THE SORT OF GUY YOU'D BE EAGER TO SAY HI TO.

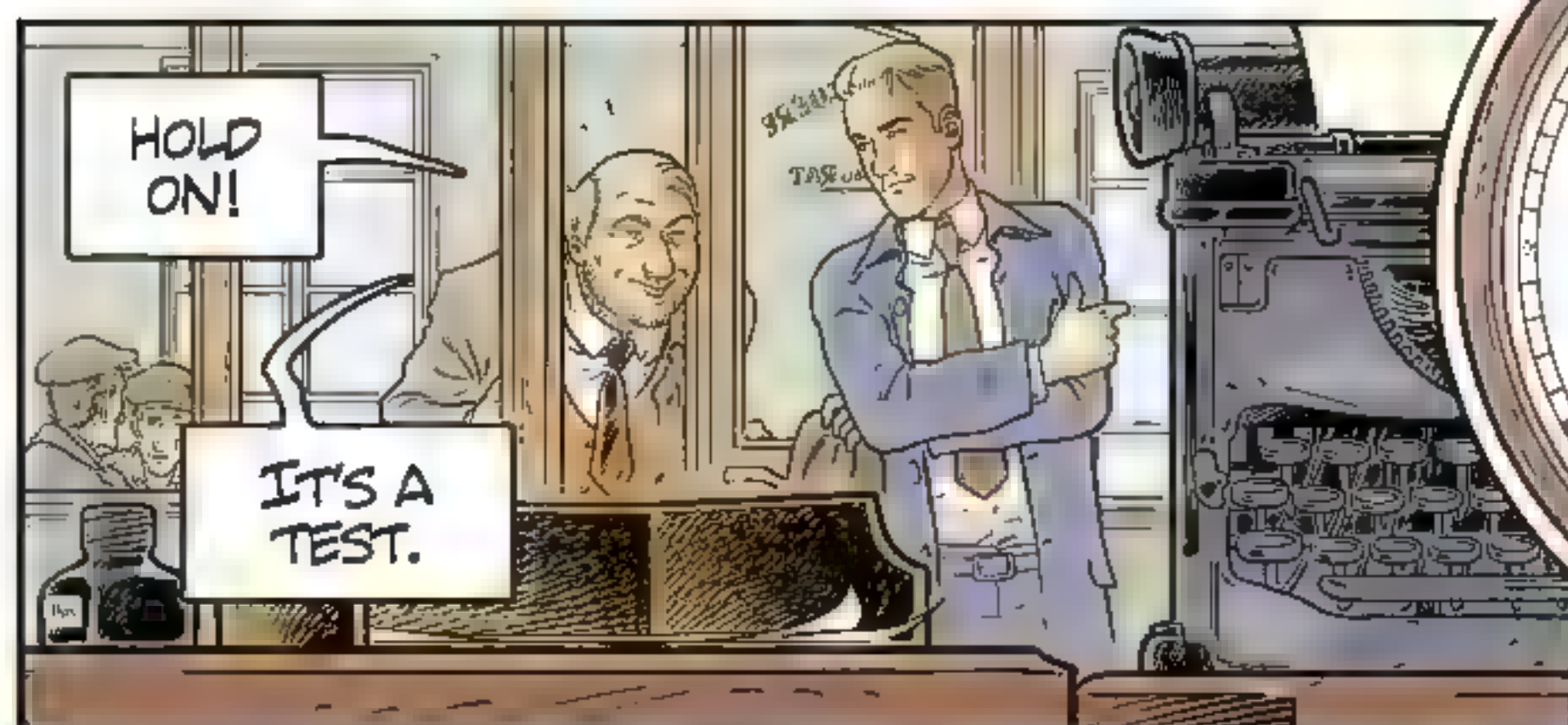


AT LUNCHTIME, HE HAD A SANDWICH BROUGHT INTO HIS OFFICE.



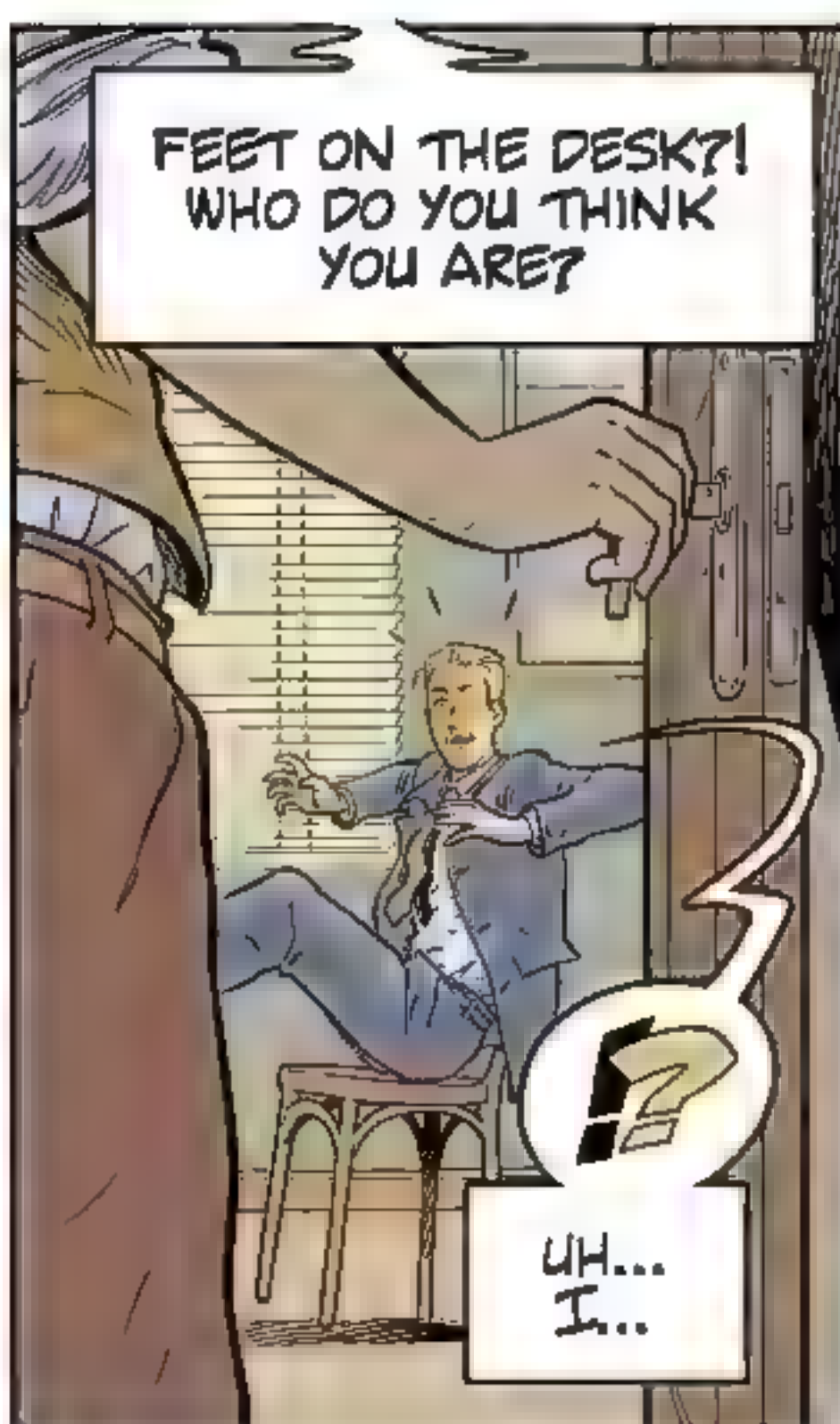
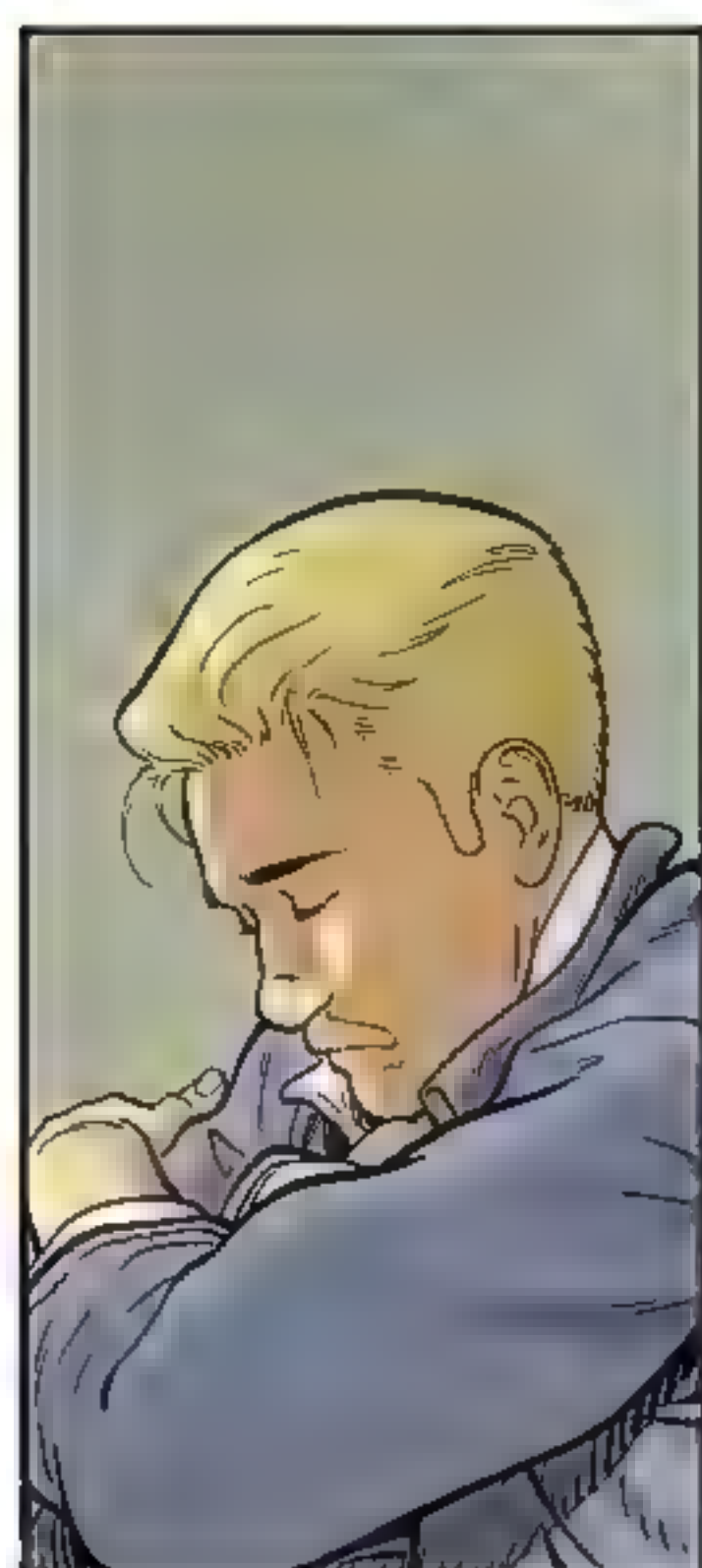
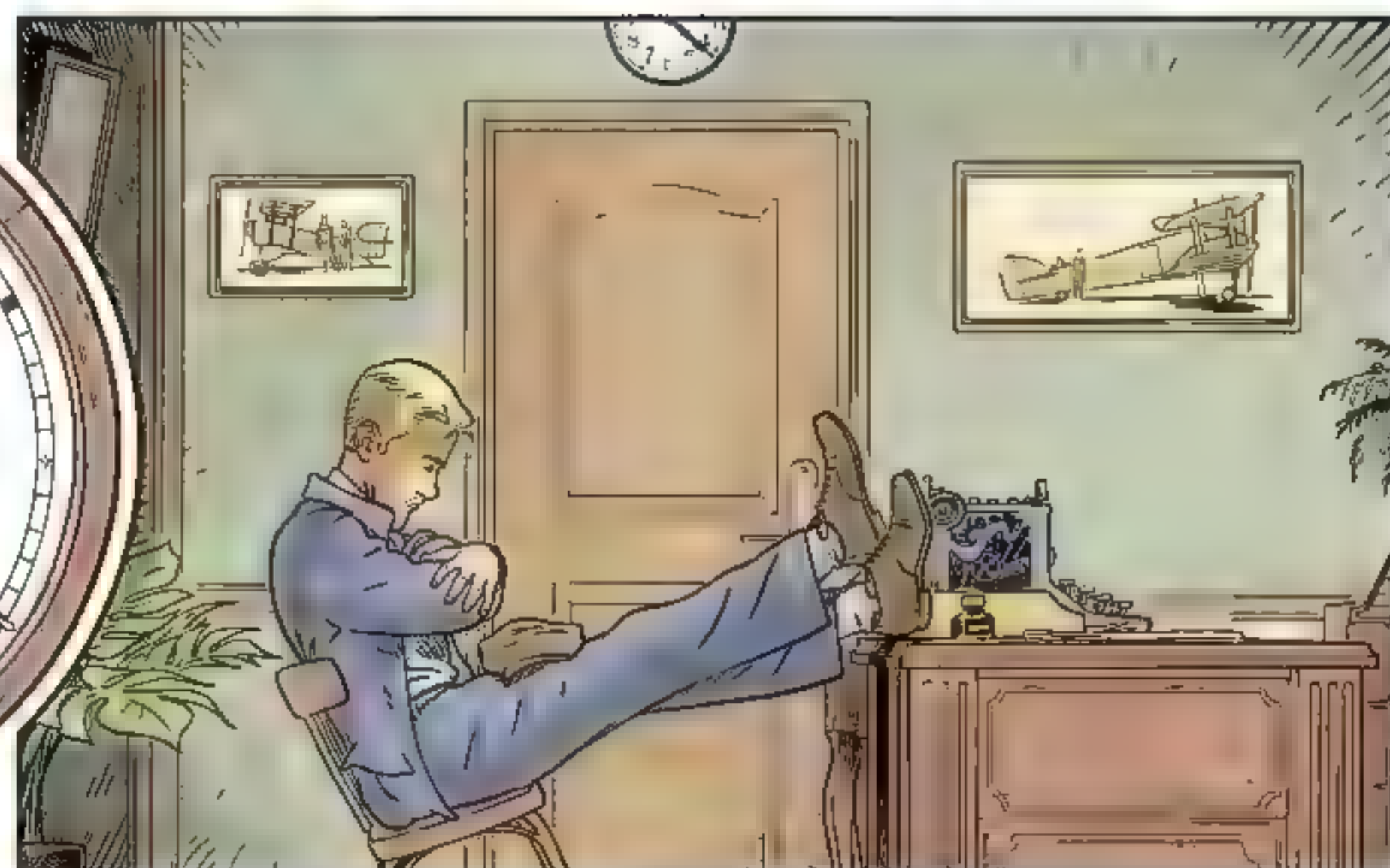
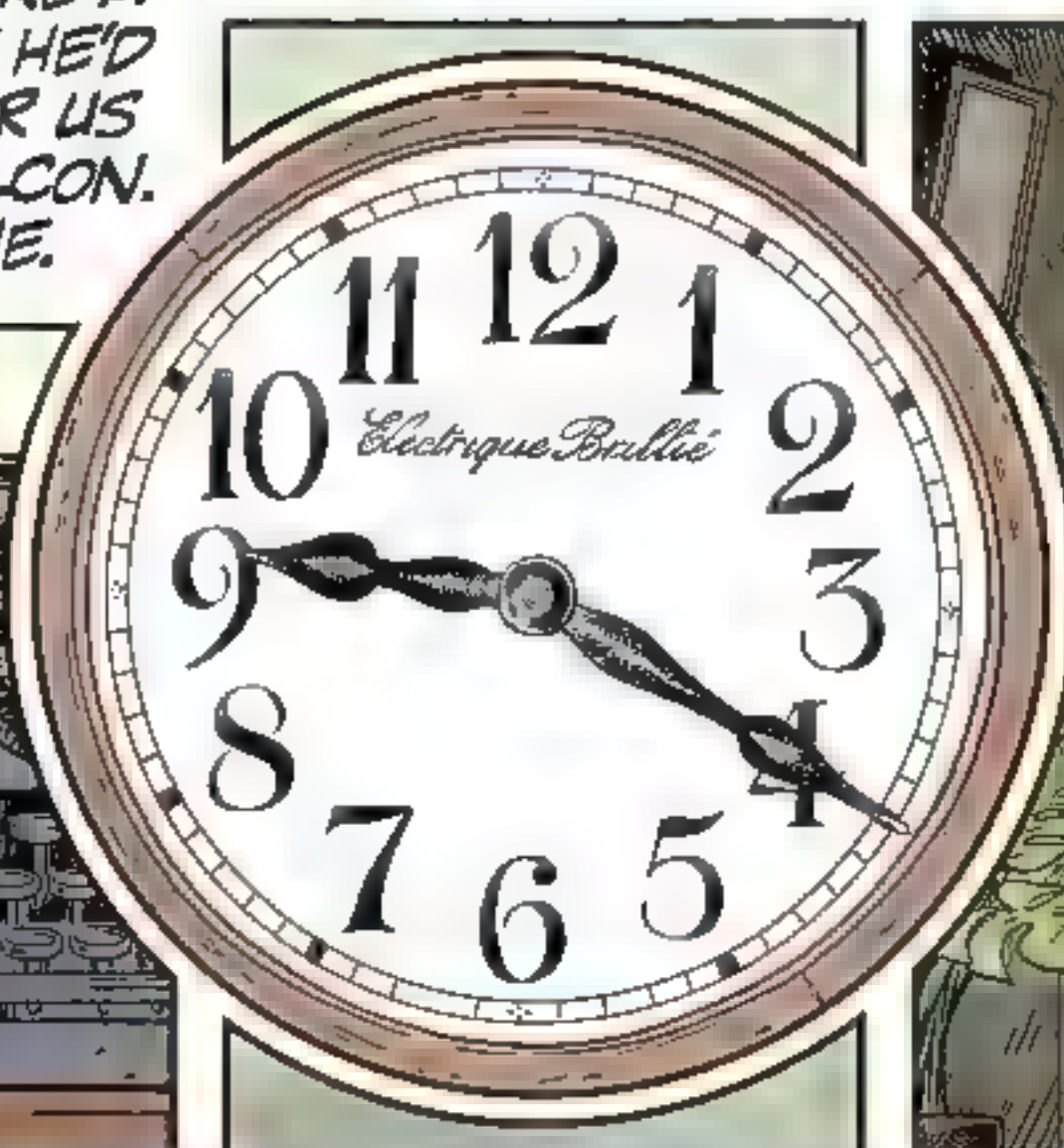
I WAS BEING TAKEN FOR A RIDE. BUT I WAITED...

...STICKING IT OUT FOR THE WHOLE AFTERNOON LIKE A SENTRY ON DUTY. OSCAR CAME TO TELL ME THAT HE'D BEEN TAKEN ON AND THAT HE'D GET A ROOM FOR US BOTH AT A PLACE IN TOWN CALLED LE GRAND BALCON. I COULD GO FIND HIM THERE WHEN I WAS DONE.



HOLD ON!

IT'S A TEST.



FEET ON THE DESK?! WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?

UH... I...



I WAS JUST RESTING MY LEGS... UH... I'VE BEEN WAITING ON MY FEET ALL DAY...

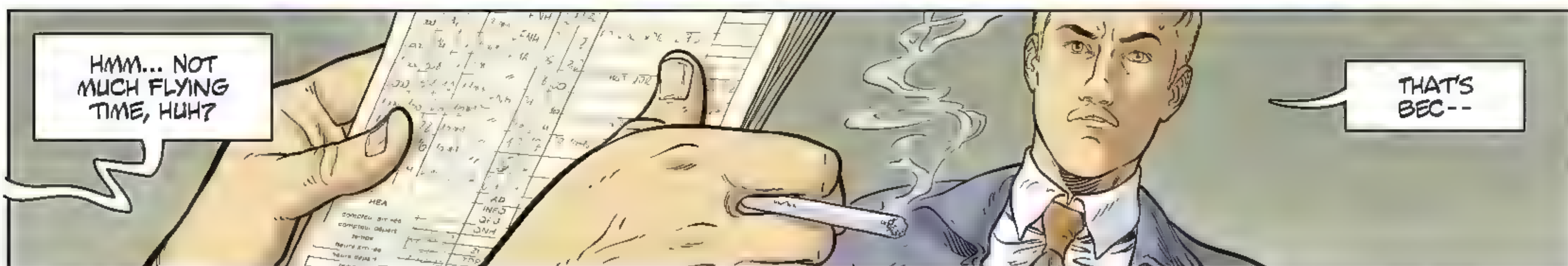
THAT'S NO EXCUSE! WHO RAISED YOU, A HERD OF GOATS?



MY PARENTS, SIR. AND THEY WERE RESPECTABLE PEOPLE, THANK YOU!

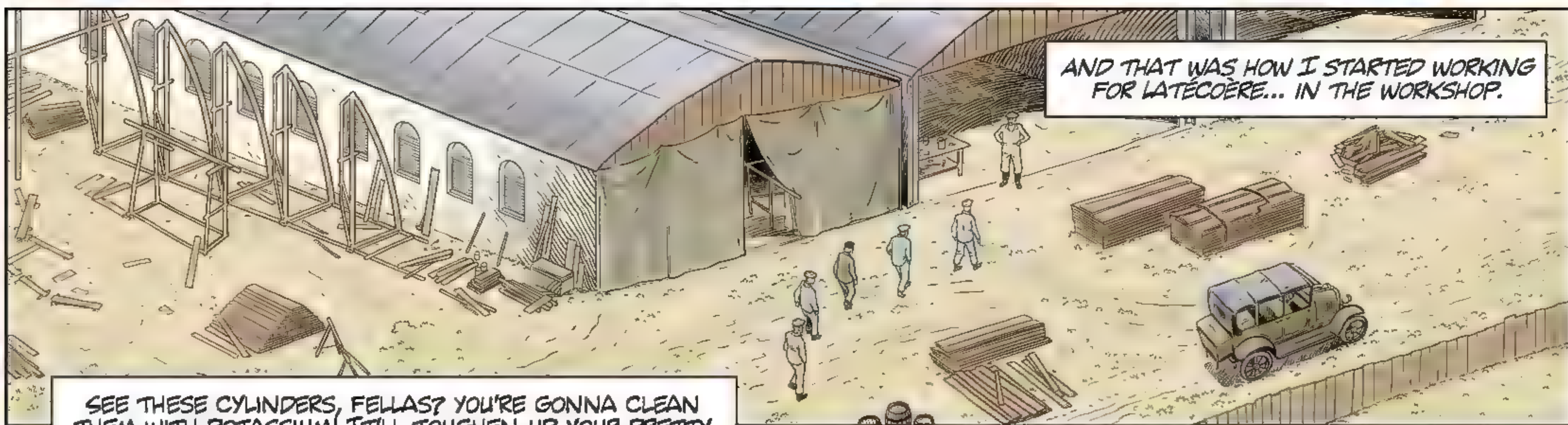
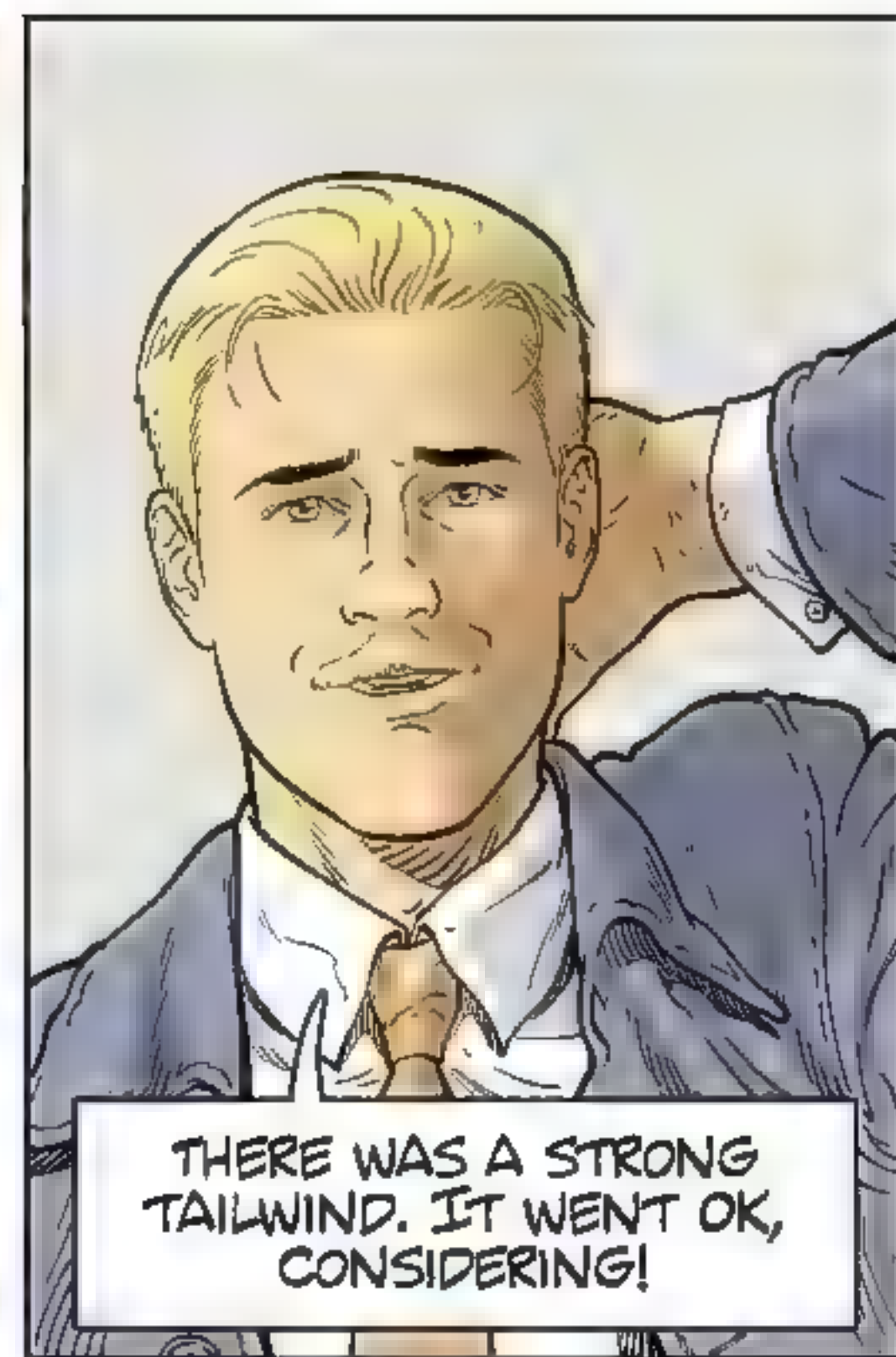
ANSWERING BACK?

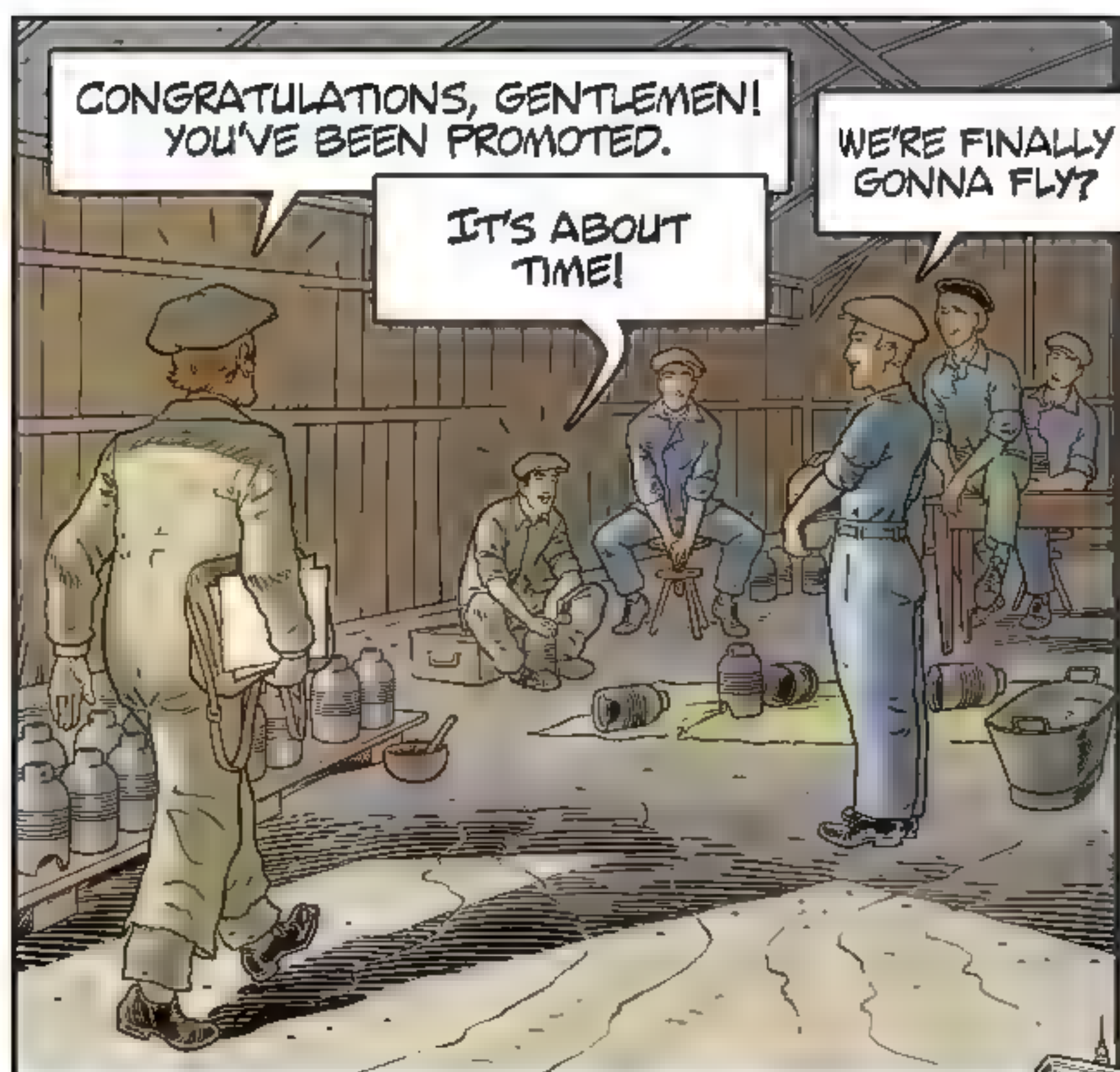
WHEN I'M NOT SHOWN RESPECT.



HMM... NOT MUCH FLYING TIME, HUH?

THAT'S BEC--





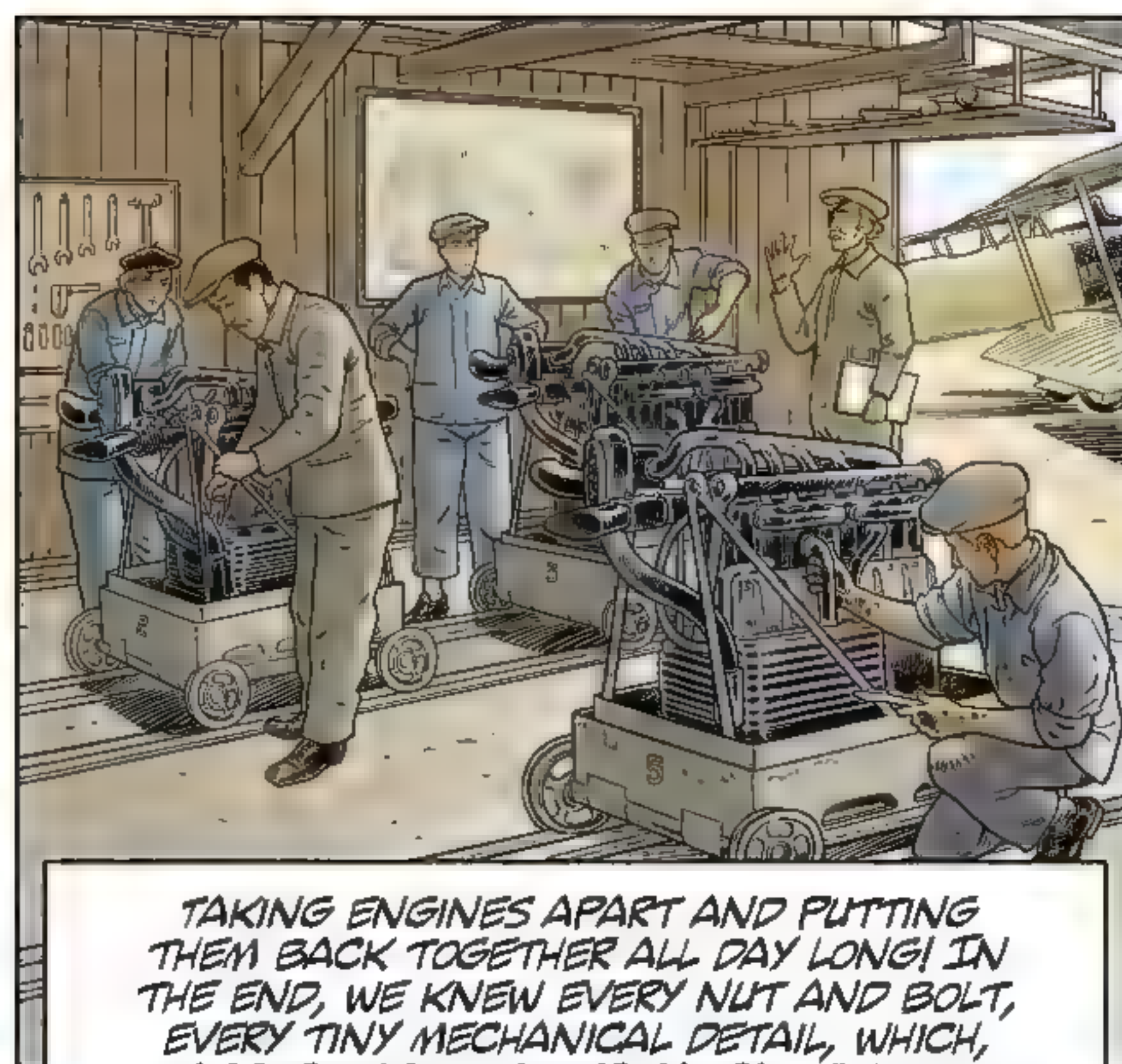
CONGRATULATIONS, GENTLEMEN!
YOU'VE BEEN PROMOTED.

IT'S ABOUT
TIME!

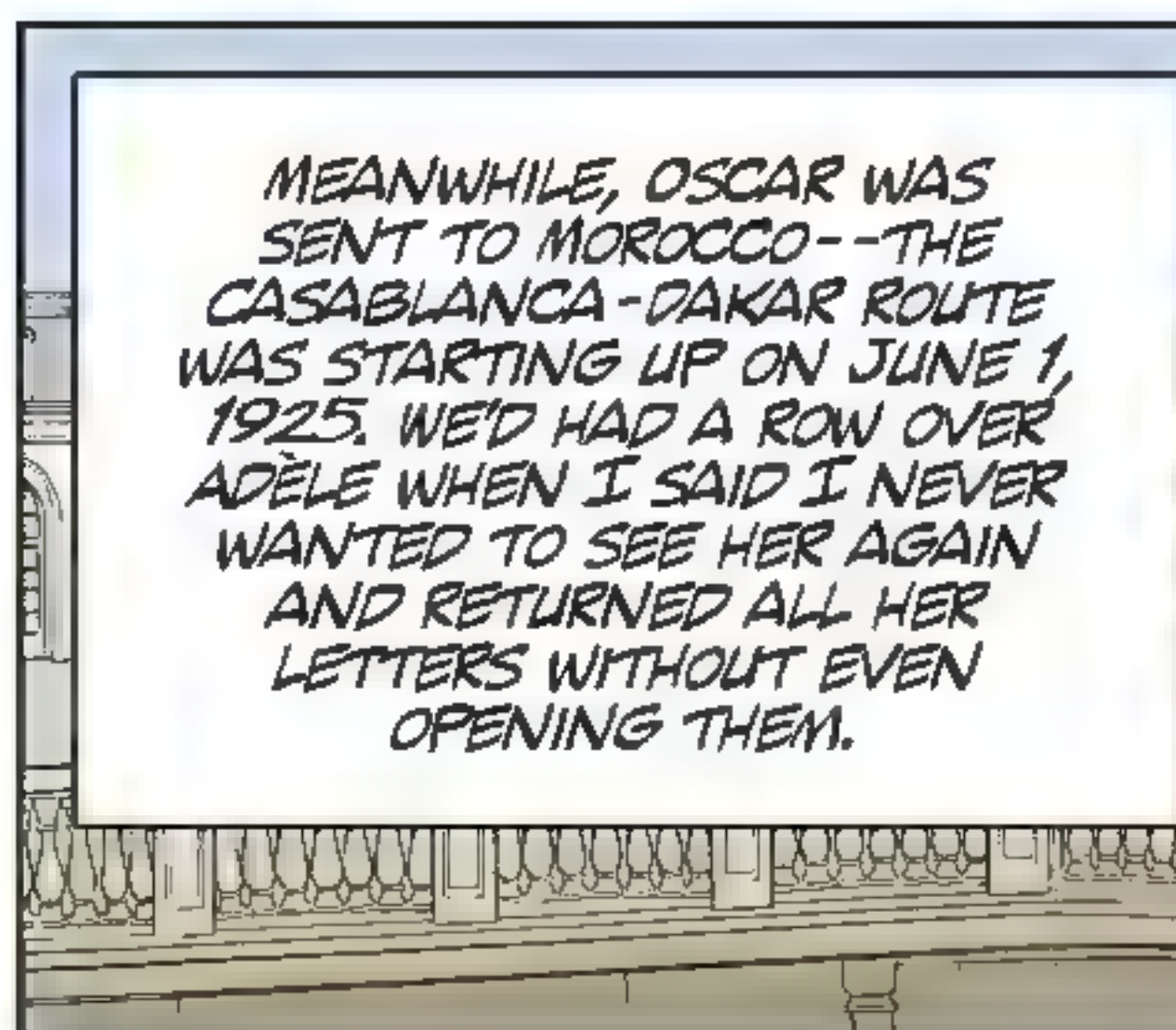
WE'RE FINALLY
GONNA FLY?



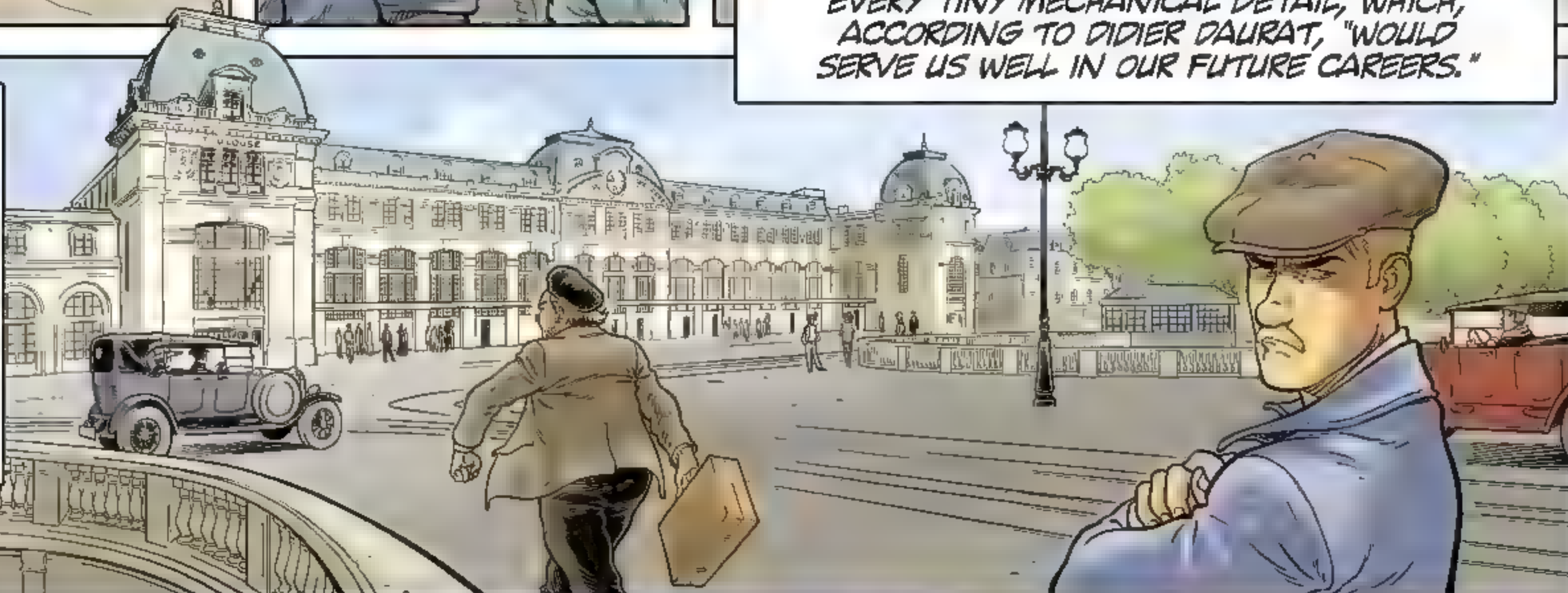
YOU'RE JOINING THE
ASSEMBLY TEAM.



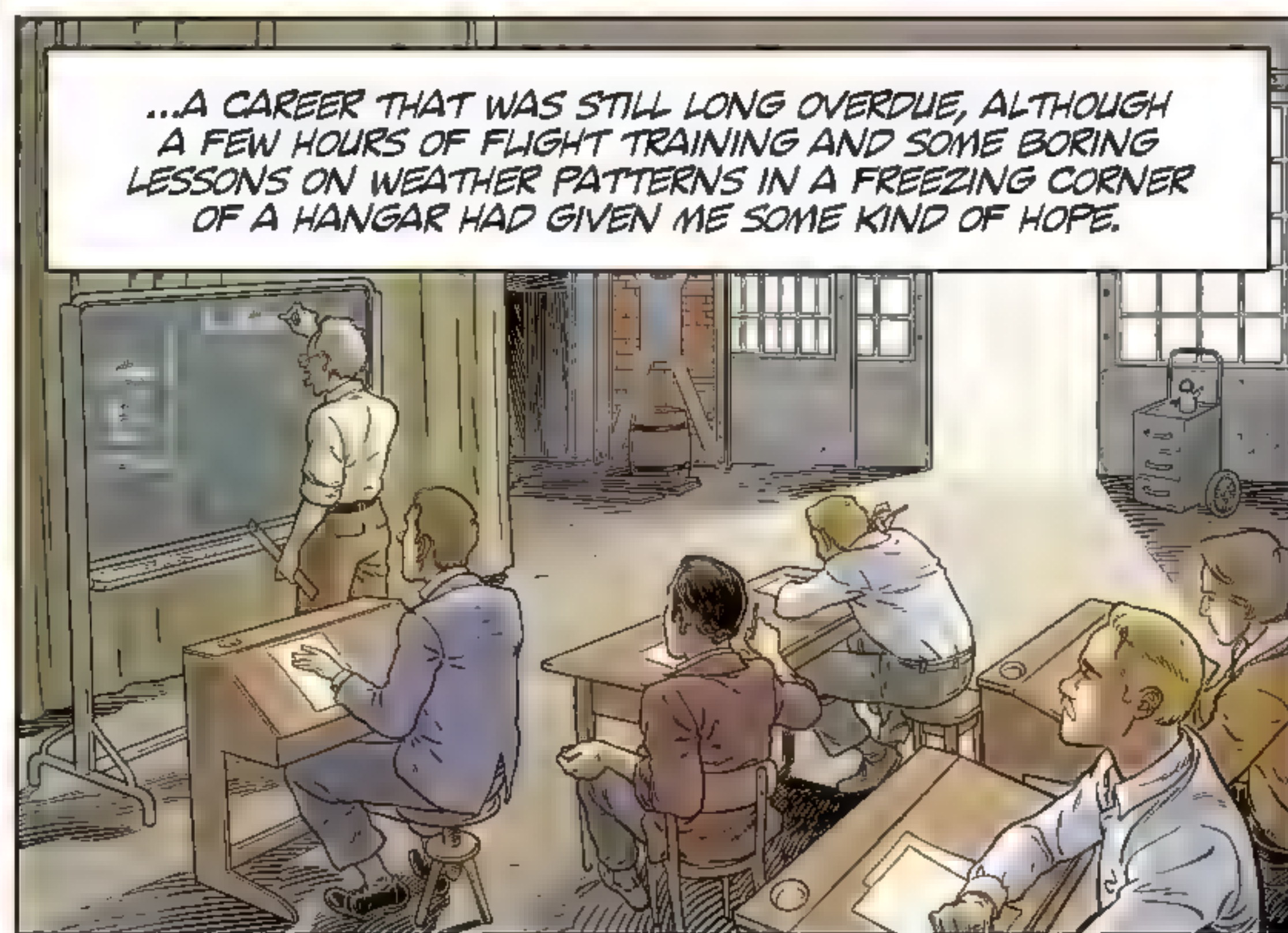
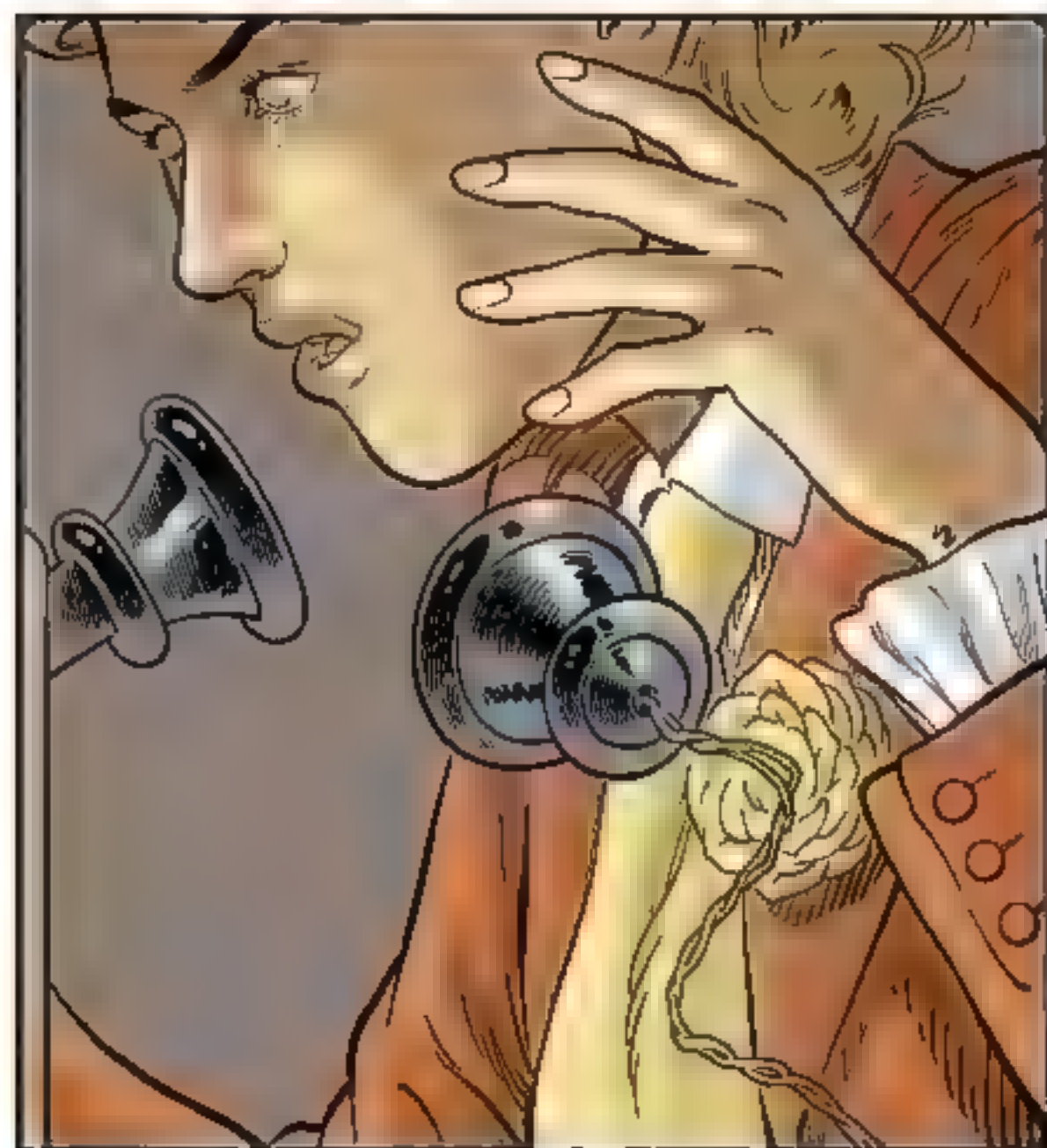
TAKING ENGINES APART AND PUTTING
THEM BACK TOGETHER ALL DAY LONG! IN
THE END, WE KNEW EVERY NUT AND BOLT,
EVERY TINY MECHANICAL DETAIL, WHICH,
ACCORDING TO DIDIER DAURAT, "WOULD
SERVE US WELL IN OUR FUTURE CAREERS."



MEANWHILE, OSCAR WAS
SENT TO MOROCCO--THE
CASABLANCA-DAKAR ROUTE
WAS STARTING UP ON JUNE 1,
1925. WE'D HAD A ROW OVER
ADELE WHEN I SAID I NEVER
WANTED TO SEE HER AGAIN
AND RETURNED ALL HER
LETTERS WITHOUT EVEN
OPENING THEM.



I STILL HAD FEELINGS FOR HER, BUT I DIDN'T WANT TO
ADMIT IT. HER DECEPTION OVER THE RECRUITMENT LETTERS
HAD STUCK IN MY CRAW, AND I'D DECIDED THAT MY LOVE FOR
HER WAS INCOMPATIBLE WITH MY CAREER AS A PILOT...



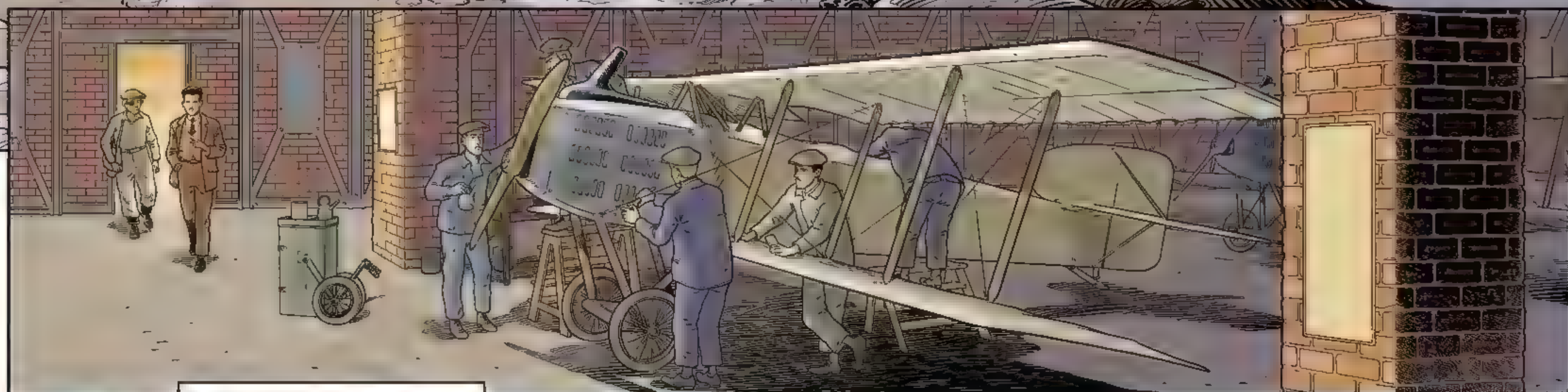
...A CAREER THAT WAS STILL LONG OVERDUE, ALTHOUGH
A FEW HOURS OF FLIGHT TRAINING AND SOME BORING
LESSONS ON WEATHER PATTERNS IN A FREEZING CORNER
OF A HANGAR HAD GIVEN ME SOME KIND OF HOPE.

FOR ME AND THE OTHERS, THIS LONG APPRENTICESHIP--PUTTING PLANES TOGETHER IN THE WORKSHOP, AND LISTENING TO THE REAL
PILOTS AT LE GRAND BALCON RECOUNTING THEIR ADVENTURES IN AFRICA--WAS, AGAIN ACCORDING TO DIDIER DAURAT, "A NECESSARY
INCUBATION PERIOD TO ABSORB THE SPIRIT OF LATÉCOÈRE AND CONVERT TO THE RELIGION OF THE AIRMAIL SERVICE."



NAMELY THAT THE MAIL WAS SACROSANCT, AND MUST BE DELIVERED ON TIME WHATEVER THE WEATHER! WE'D SOMETIMES HEAR THAT A PILOT HAD SADLY CRASHED IN THE PYRENEES OR THE SIERRA NEVADA... (1)

...BUT EVEN THIS DIDN'T DULL OUR ENTHUSIASM. IN FACT, WE WERE SO FULL OF OURSELVES THAT WE SAW IT AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO TAKE HIS PLACE.



ALL FIVE OF YOU, ON THE RUNWAY TOMORROW AT 6:30 A.M.!



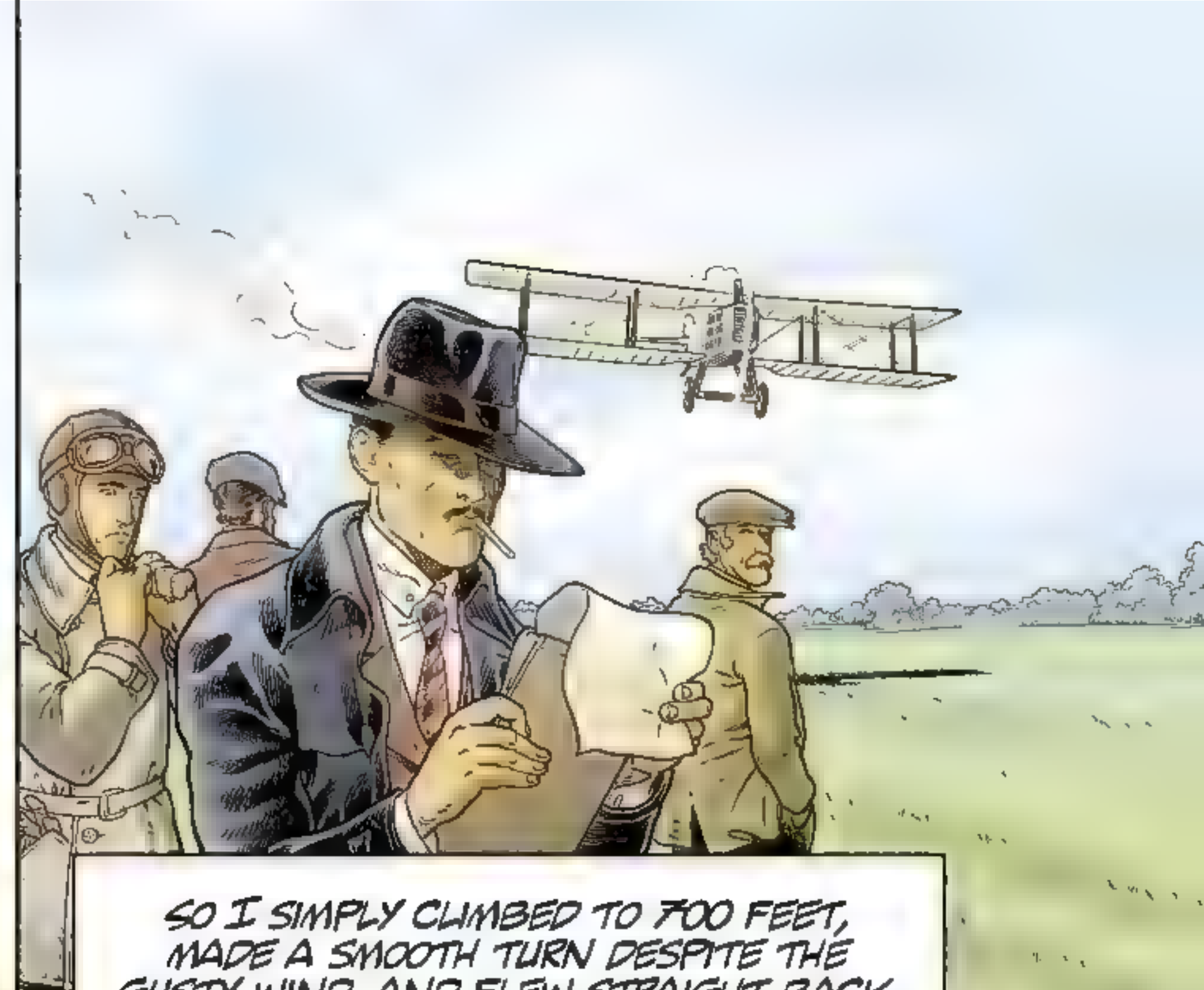
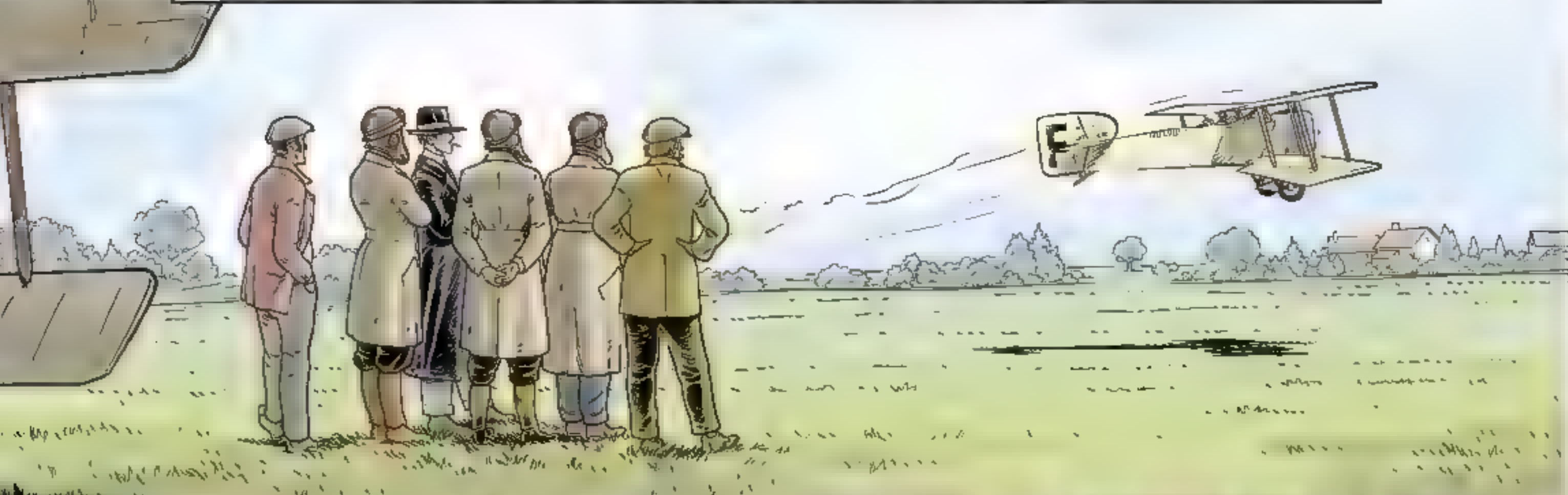
OUR TURN AT LAST! DAURAT WAS PUTTING US TO THE TEST.

WE TURNED IN EARLY, BUT OF COURSE COULDN'T SLEEP.



(1) MEANING "SNOW-CLAD RANGE" IN SPANISH, IT TIPS OUT AT OVER 11,000 FT.

I WAS THE FIRST TO GO UP. AN OLD HAND WHO KNEW I'D FLOWN WITH THE TIGERS HAD WARNED ME NOT TO DO ANY AEROBATICS-- "MR. SIBERIA" HATED THAT. TWO MONTHS EARLIER, MERMOSZ HAD TRIED TO IMPRESS HIM WITH SOME STUNTS AND WAS ALMOST FIRED ON THE SPOT.



SO I SIMPLY CLIMBED TO 700 FEET, MADE A SMOOTH TURN DESPITE THE GUSTY WIND, AND FLEW STRAIGHT BACK, KEEPING HER LEVEL AND TOUCHING DOWN RIGHT AT THE END OF THE RUNWAY...

... "LIKE A BUS DRIVER," JUST THE WAY HE WANTED!

JOSEF SCHÄFER, PASSED!

BUT IF ANYONE LET THEIR NERVES SHOW BY FLYING UNEVENLY OR HESITANTLY, THE BIG BOSS WAS MERCILESS IN HIS CONDEMNATION.

VINCENT DE MANNEUR, FAILED.

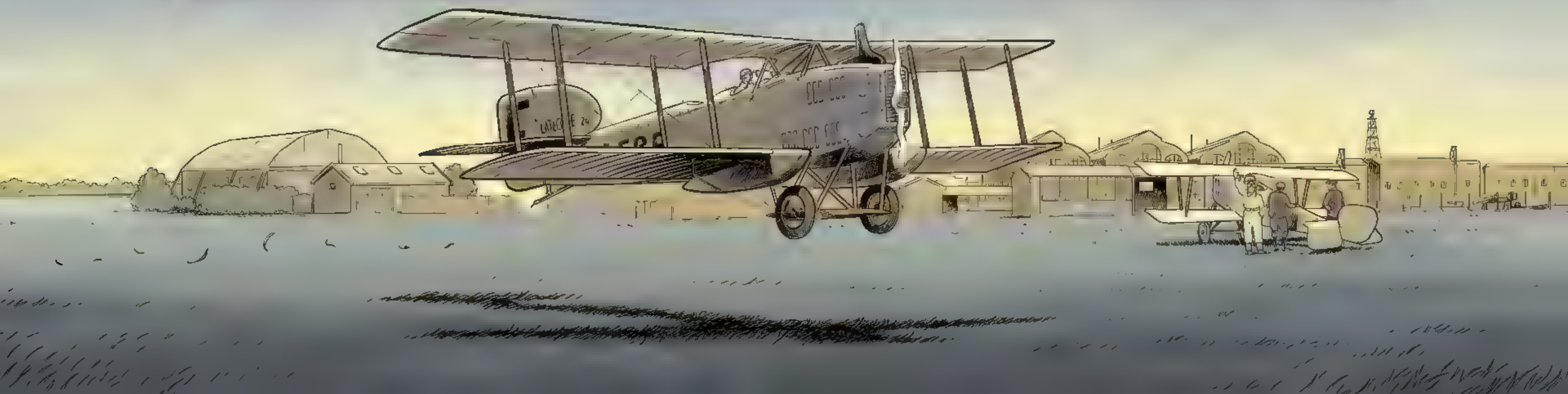
BUT I--

I JUST SAVED YOUR LIFE, YOUNG MAN. YOU NEED NERVES OF STEEL TO SURVIVE A STORM IN THE MOUNTAINS. FIND ANOTHER CAREER...

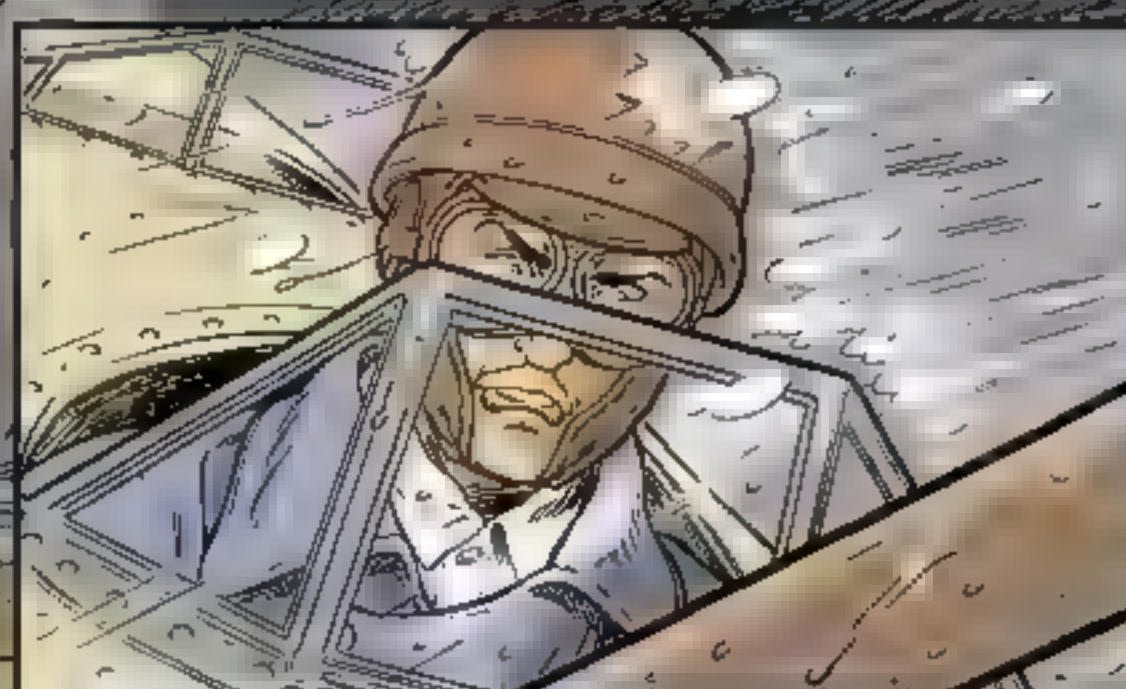
NEXT!

...OR ANOTHER AIRLINE!

THE VERY NEXT MORNING, I TOOK THE MAIL TO BARCELONA IN A STURDY OLD BREGUET XIV. I WAS TO OPERATE THE BARCELONA-MALAGA LEG WITH TWO OTHER PILOTS. AND WHAT A LEG IT WAS! OVER 600 MILES--SEVEN HOURS' FLYING IF THE WEATHER WAS KIND. AND IF IT WASN'T, YOU NEVER KNEW HOW LONG IT MIGHT TAKE.



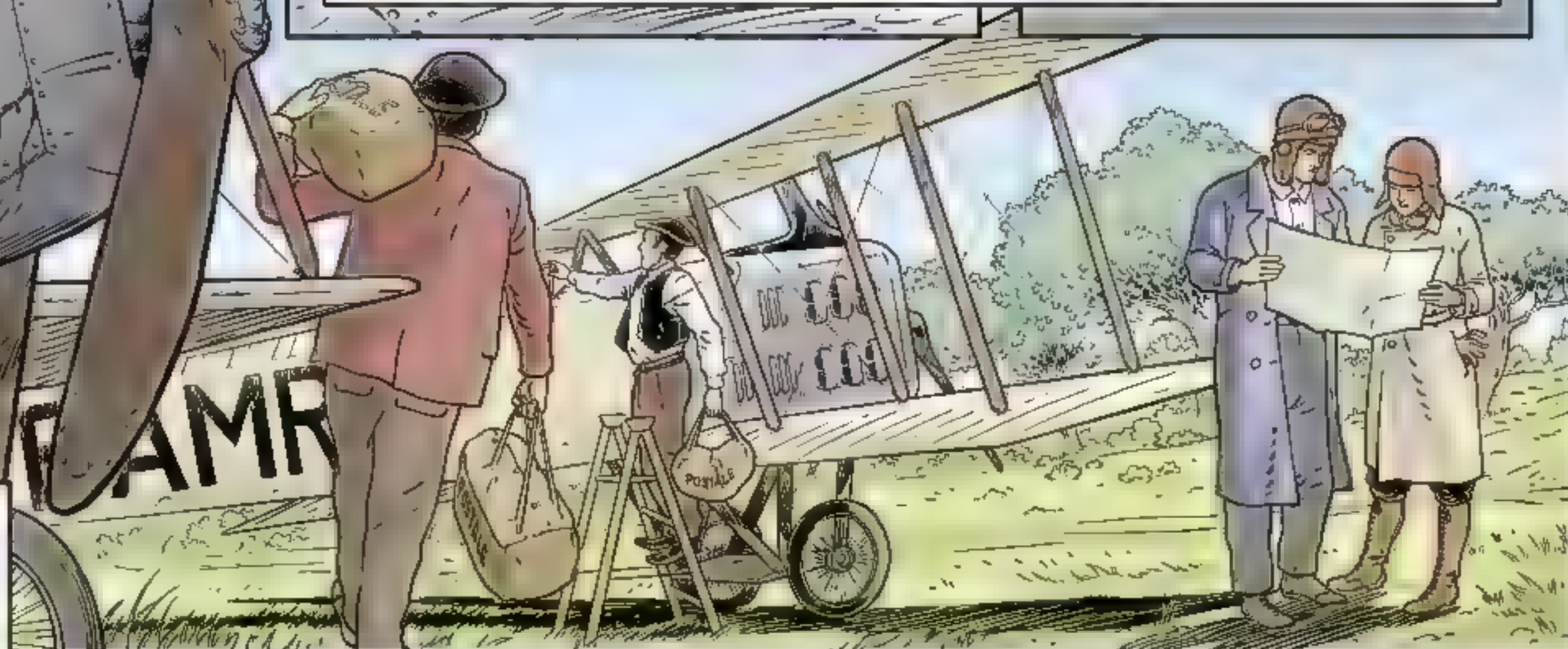
WE'D FLY ALONG THE COAST AS FAR AS ALICANTE, THEN CUT ACROSS THE SIERRA NEVADA TO MALAGA. ONE WRONG COMPASS BEARING, AND WE MIGHT SMASH INTO A STRAY PEAK. WE DIDN'T HAVE ENOUGH FUEL TO GO AROUND THE MOUNTAINS, AND THE BREGUET XIV WASN'T POWERFUL ENOUGH TO FLY ABOVE STORMS.



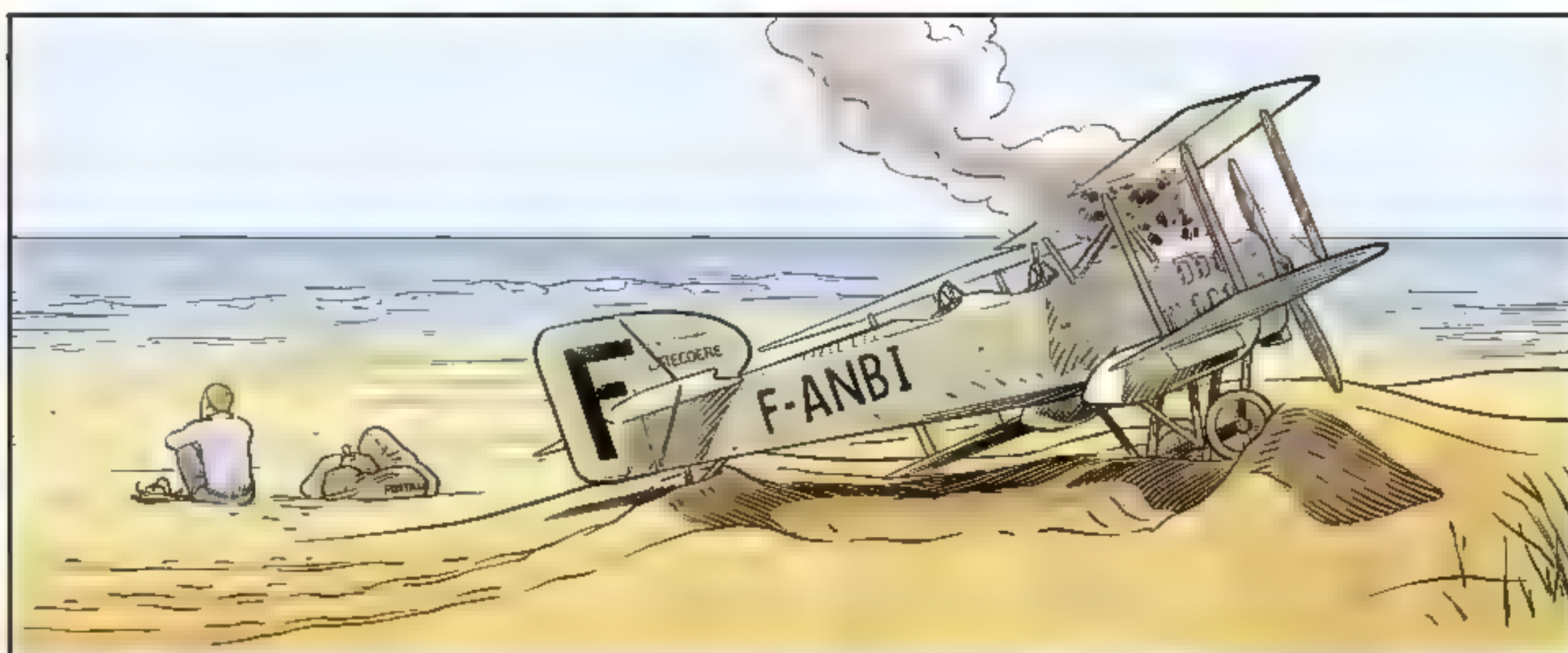
SO IT BECAME A PHYSICAL STRUGGLE WITH THE ELEMENTS--CONSTANTLY CORRECTING THE SUDDEN RISING AND FALLING OF THE AIRPLANE, KEEPING AN EYE ON ALL OF THE INSTRUMENTS, AND NOT LOSING SIGHT OF THE COASTLINE, OUR PATH TO SALVATION.

AS SOON AS WE LANDED IN MALAGA, WE HAD TO TRANSFER THE MAIL TO ANOTHER PLANE--ITS ENGINE ALREADY RUNNING--TO BE TAKEN ON TO MOROCCO.

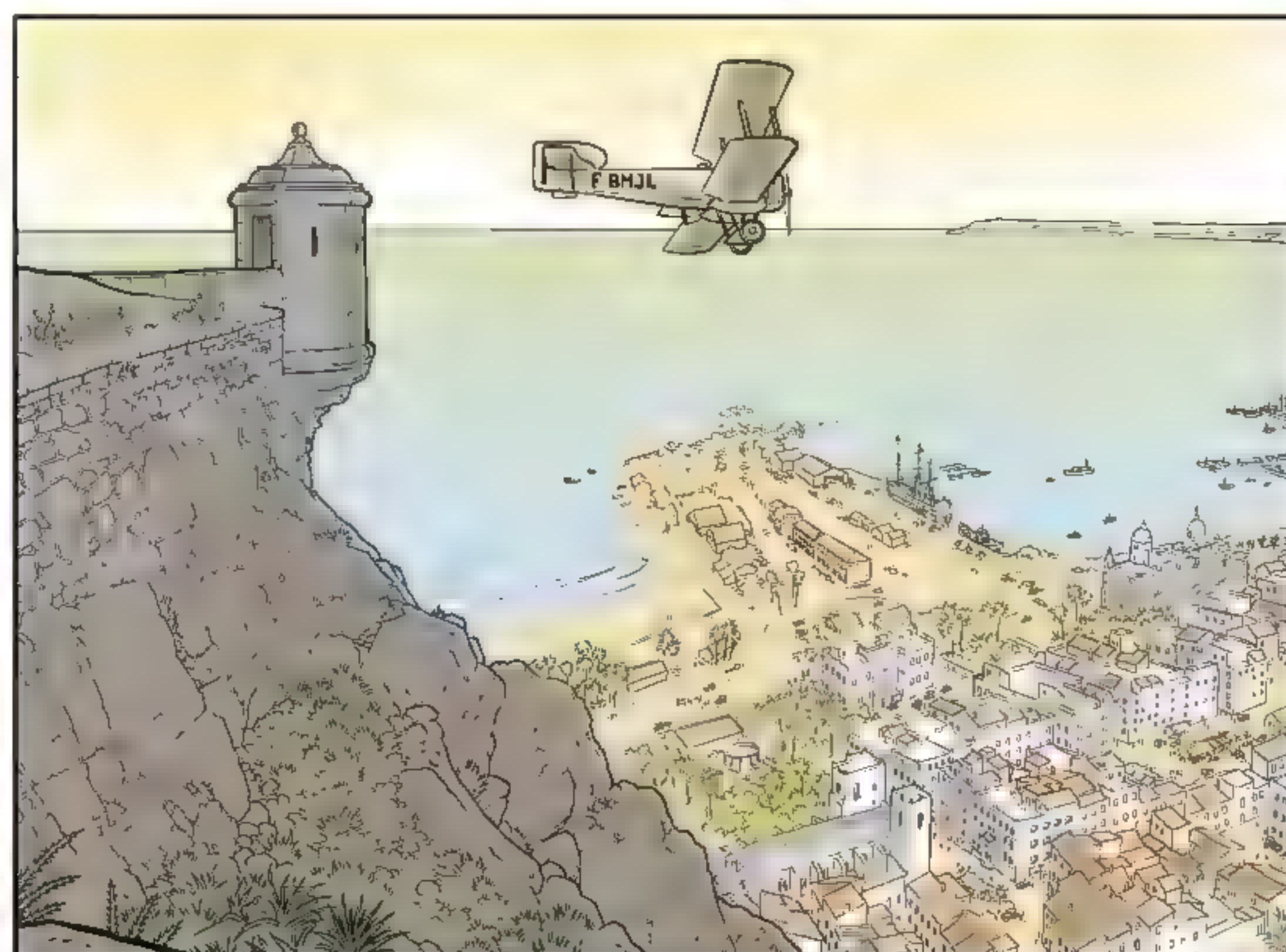
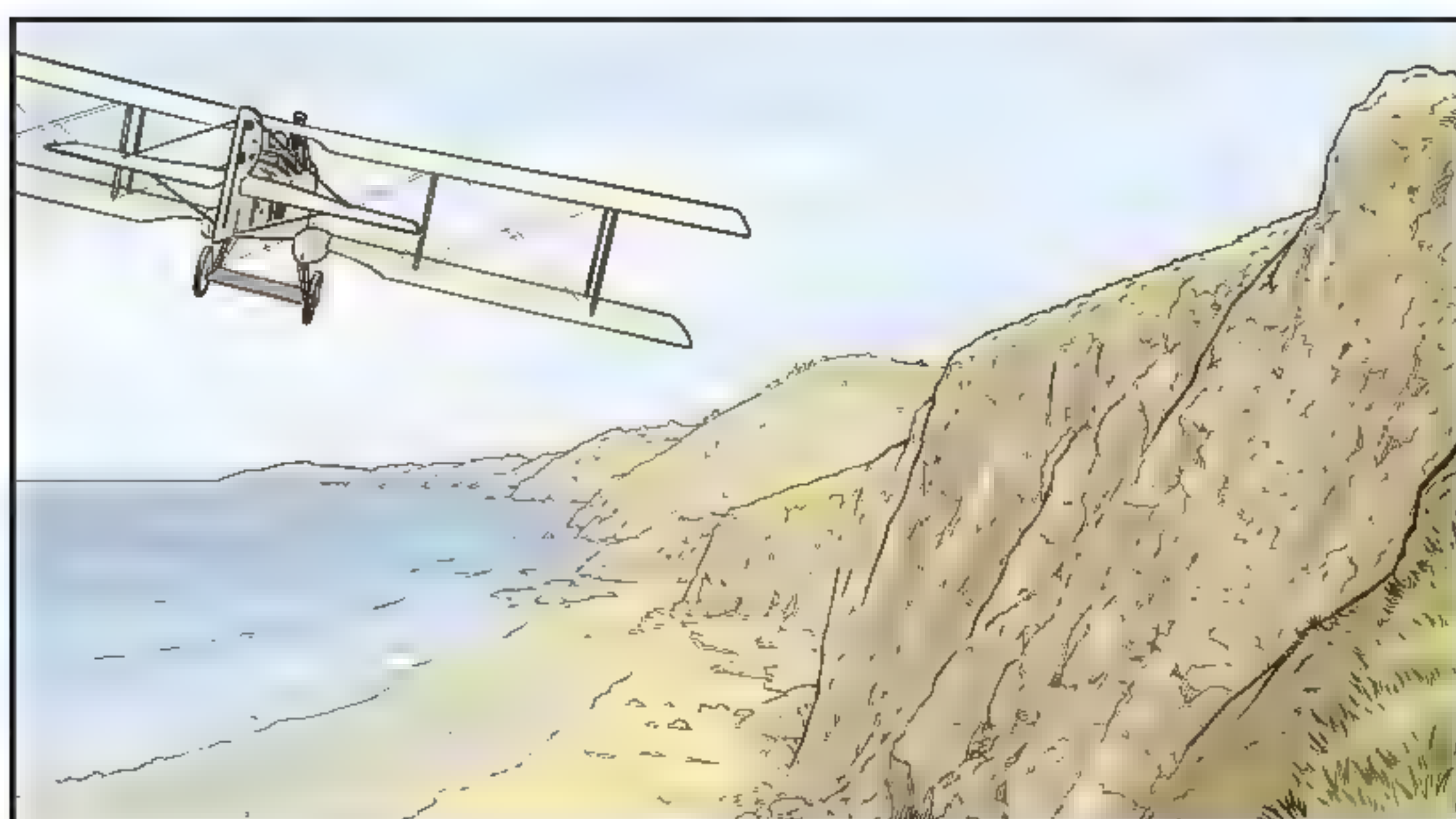
I LEARNED TO IDENTIFY EVERY LANDMARK ALONG THE ROUTE--RIVERS, BOULDERS, FARMS--AS WELL AS PLACES TO LAND IF THE ENGINE CONKED OUT... WHICH IT DID OFTEN, HAVING BEEN PATCHED UP SO MANY TIMES.



THIS MADE ME WONDER ABOUT THE WAY THE BUSINESS WORLD WAS RUN. HERE I WAS IN 1925, HAVING SPENT MONTHS BUILDING BRAND NEW PLANES FOR LATÉCOÈRE, NOW FULFILLING THE GREAT DREAM OF LINKING THE CONTINENTS IN A MACHINE THAT HAD BEEN DESIGNED BEFORE THE GREAT WAR!



BUT THE MAIL HAD TO BE DELIVERED, SOMETIMES ALONG WITH A PASSENGER OR TWO SQUATTING NERVOUSLY AMONG THE SACKS. SO I WENT ON RISKING MY LIFE BECAUSE I LOVED FLYING, AND IN THE END I WAS HAPPY TO HAVE CONVERTED MY PRIMITIVE INSTINCTS INTO WHAT I TOOK TO BE A NOBLE ENTERPRISE.



MY THIRST FOR ADVENTURE THEN DREW ME TO THE CASABLANCA-DAKAR ROUTE, WHICH HAD OPENED SOME MONTHS EARLIER. I KNEW THAT DAURAT WAS LOOKING FOR NEW PILOTS TO MAKE UP THE LOSSES THAT ILLNESS, MARAUDING BEDOUIN, OR THE DESERT ITSELF HAD ALREADY CAUSED IN AFRICA. BUT SO FAR HE'D REJECTED MY APPLICATIONS.

ONE DAY, I ARRIVED IN ALICANTE AFTER A DIFFICULT FLIGHT. FOR ONCE, I WAS TO STAY PUT.

ANOTHER PILOT, WHO WAS BASED IN AFRICA, WOULD BE TAKING MY PLANE ON TO MALAGA AND THE NEXT DAY TO MOROCCO.

AS IT HAPPENED, I WASN'T TOO UNHAPPY ABOUT THE CHANGE OF ROUTINE.

NICE LANDING, MR. SCHÄFER!

THANKS, JUANJO!

THERE'S NO WAY I CAN TAKE OFF IN THIS WEATHER!

YES...

...YOU CAN!

YOU KNOW THE RULES, DON'T YOU?

YOU'RE NOT THE ONE RISKING YOUR LIFE!

I RISKED IT IN MY DAY...

FOR THE MAIL, I KNOW! BUT IT CAN WAIT A DAY, CAN'T IT?!

?

?!

THE WORLD WON'T COME TO AN END! PEOPLE WILL STILL GO ABOUT THEIR BUSINESS, RIGHT?!

I SEE! SO YOU GET TO DECIDE HOW THE WORLD SHOULD BE RUN NOW, DO YOU?

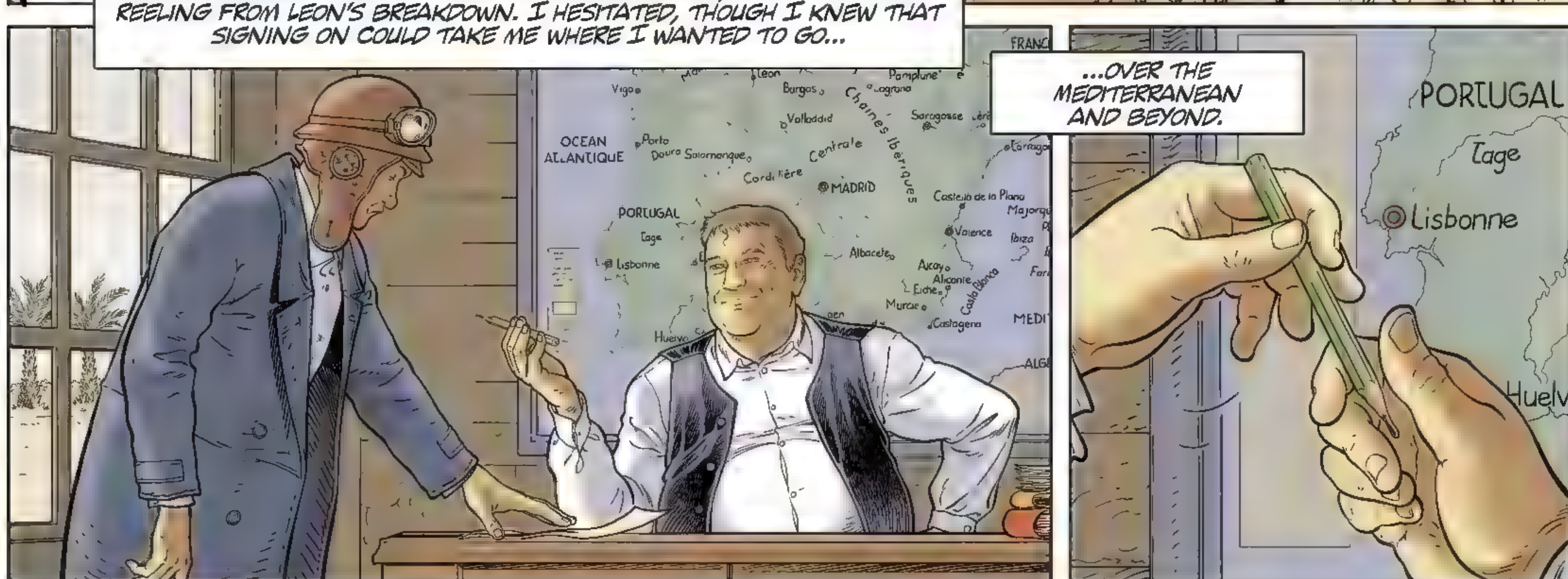
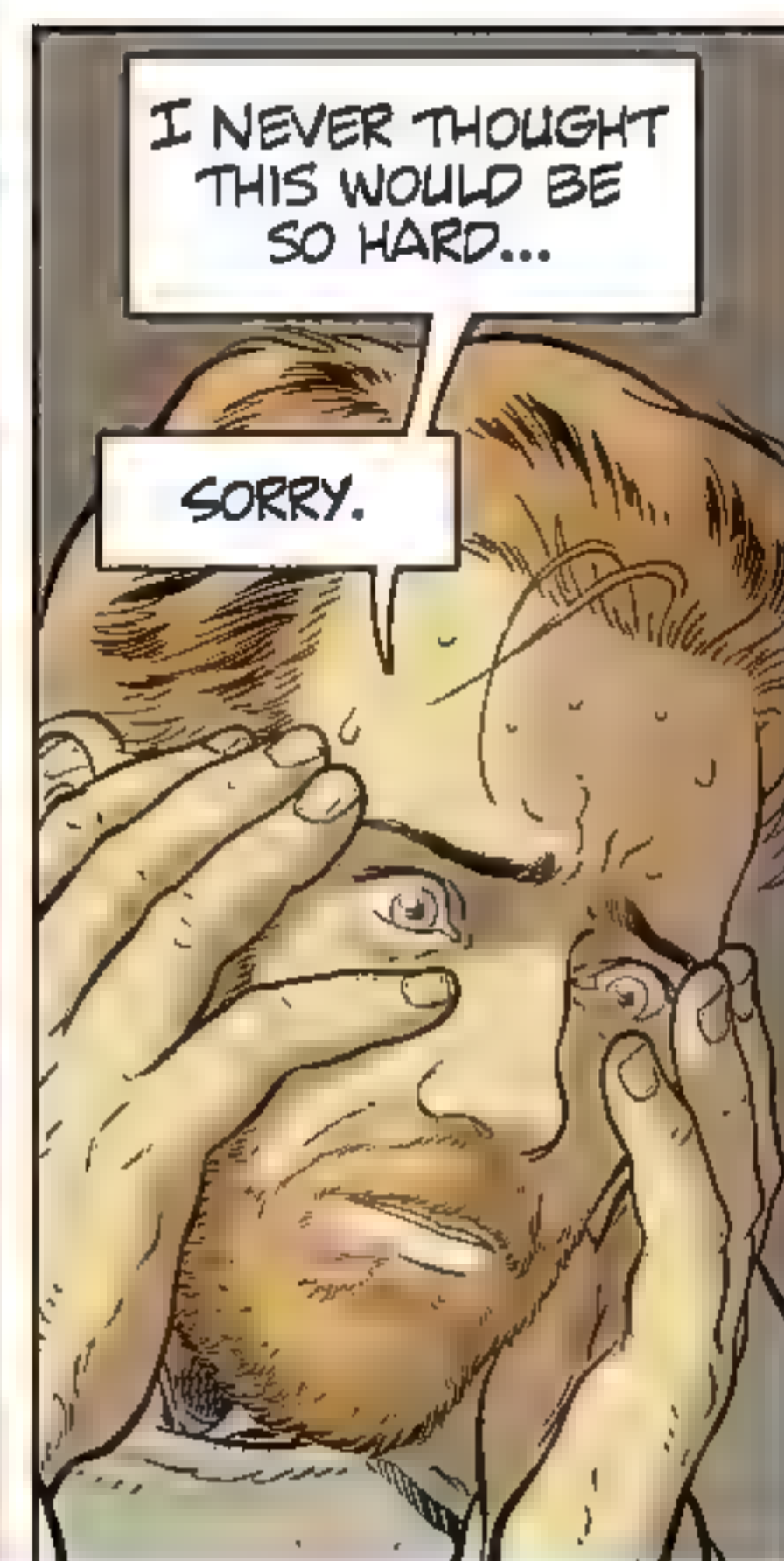
UH... N-NO...

...BUT I DECIDE WHETHER I LIVE OR DIE.

WELL, NO ONE'S FORCING YOU.

I'M TOLD THE WIND'S GONNA DROP IN MALAGA.

AND IF IT DOESN'T?



AND THAT WAS WHAT HAPPENED--ALTHOUGH I HAD TO SPEND OVER TWO MONTHS HOPPING BETWEEN MOROCCO AND ALGERIA BEFORE MY DREAM OF GRAND ADVENTURE BECAME A REALITY.



AT LAST! LEAVING TIZNIT BEHIND ME, I'D PASSED THE LAST OUTPOST OF THE CIVILIZED WORLD. I FINALLY FLEW OUT OVER THE DAZZLING HELL OF THE DESERT WHERE THE DISSIDENT SOUTH MOROCCAN ZONE BEGAN.

VR00000000

THE OLD HANDS HAD TOLD ME, EXPLAINED TO ME, WARNED ME, BUT IT DIDN'T STOP ME BEING GRIPPED BY CONFUSING EMOTIONS...

VR000

...AN ALMOST MORBID FASCINATION WITH THIS VAST EMPTINESS, ALLIED TO THE RAW FEAR OF FLYING OVER A LAND FILLED WITH DANGER IN AN UNPREDICTABLE METAL MACHINE...

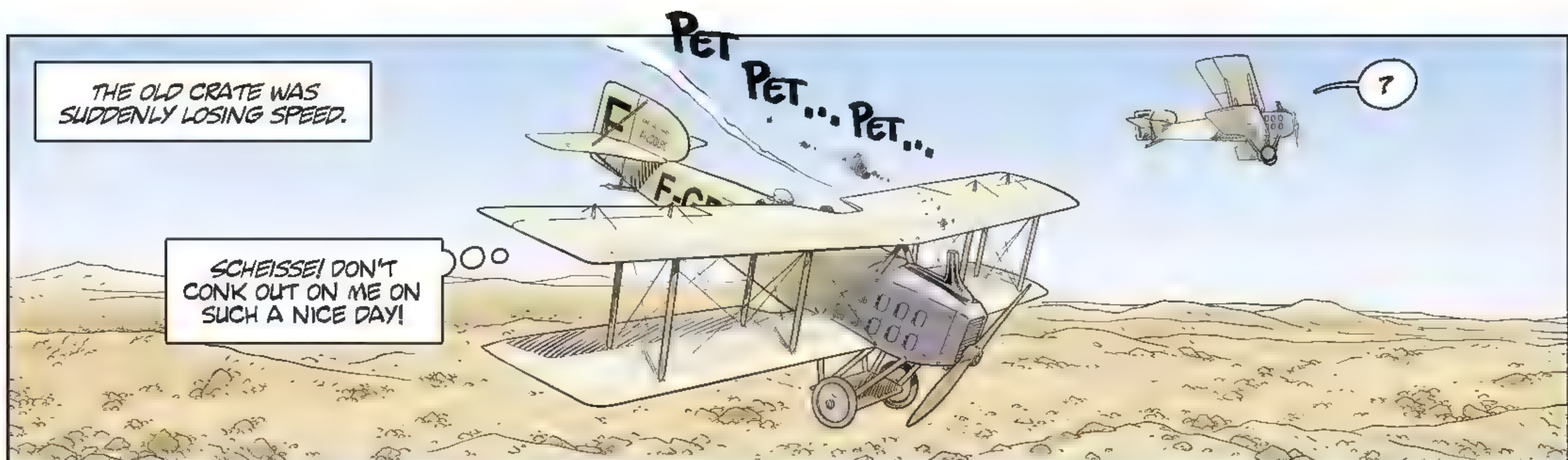
PAW

FOLLOWING THE COASTLINE THAT STRETCHED FOR HUNDREDS OF MILES TOWARD MY DESTINATION, CAPE JUBY, THE HOURS OF FLIGHT FINALLY CALMED MY FEARS, LEAVING ME IN A MEDITATIVE STATE, A KIND OF POETIC DREAMWORLD.

VR00000000

IT WAS THE ENGINE'S DISTURBING SPLUTTERING THAT BROUGHT ME BACK TO REALITY, REMINDING ME THAT HERE IN AFRICA WE HAD TO CONTEND WITH THE SAME BEAT-UP OLD BREGUETS THAT WE'D HAD IN SPAIN.

PET
PET
PET

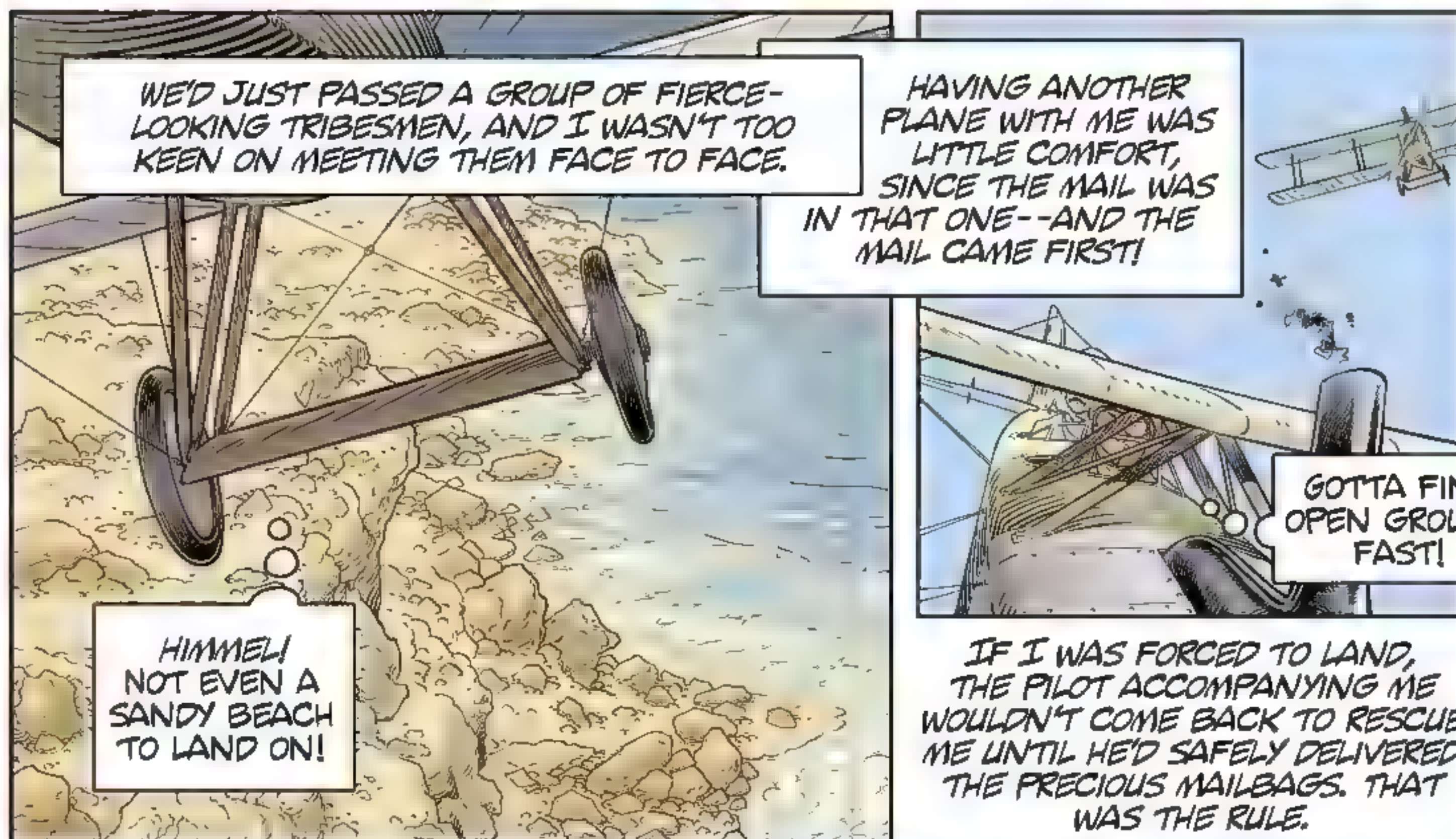


THE OLD CRATE WAS
SUDDENLY LOSING SPEED.

SCHEISSE! DON'T
CONK OUT ON ME ON
SUCH A NICE DAY!

PET
PET... PET...

?



WE'D JUST PASSED A GROUP OF FIERCE-
LOOKING TRIBESMEN, AND I WASN'T TOO
KEEN ON MEETING THEM FACE TO FACE.

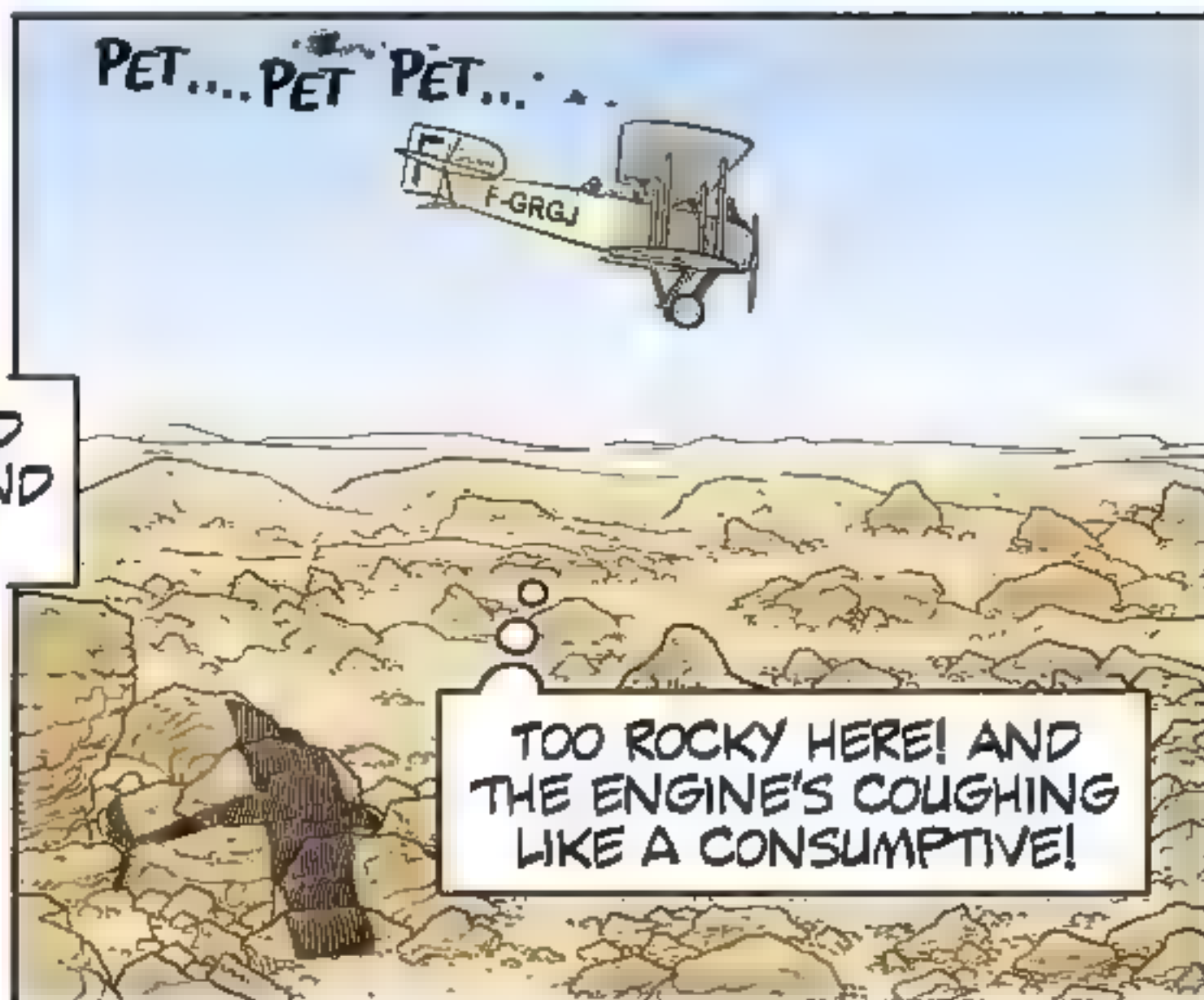
HAVING ANOTHER
PLANE WITH ME WAS
LITTLE COMFORT,
SINCE THE MAIL WAS
IN THAT ONE--AND THE
MAIL CAME FIRST!

HIMMEL!
NOT EVEN A
SANDY BEACH
TO LAND ON!

GOTTA FIND
OPEN GROUND
FAST!

IF I WAS FORCED TO LAND,
THE PILOT ACCOMPANYING ME
WOULDN'T COME BACK TO RESCUE
ME UNTIL HE'D SAFELY DELIVERED
THE PRECIOUS MAILBAGS. THAT
WAS THE RULE.

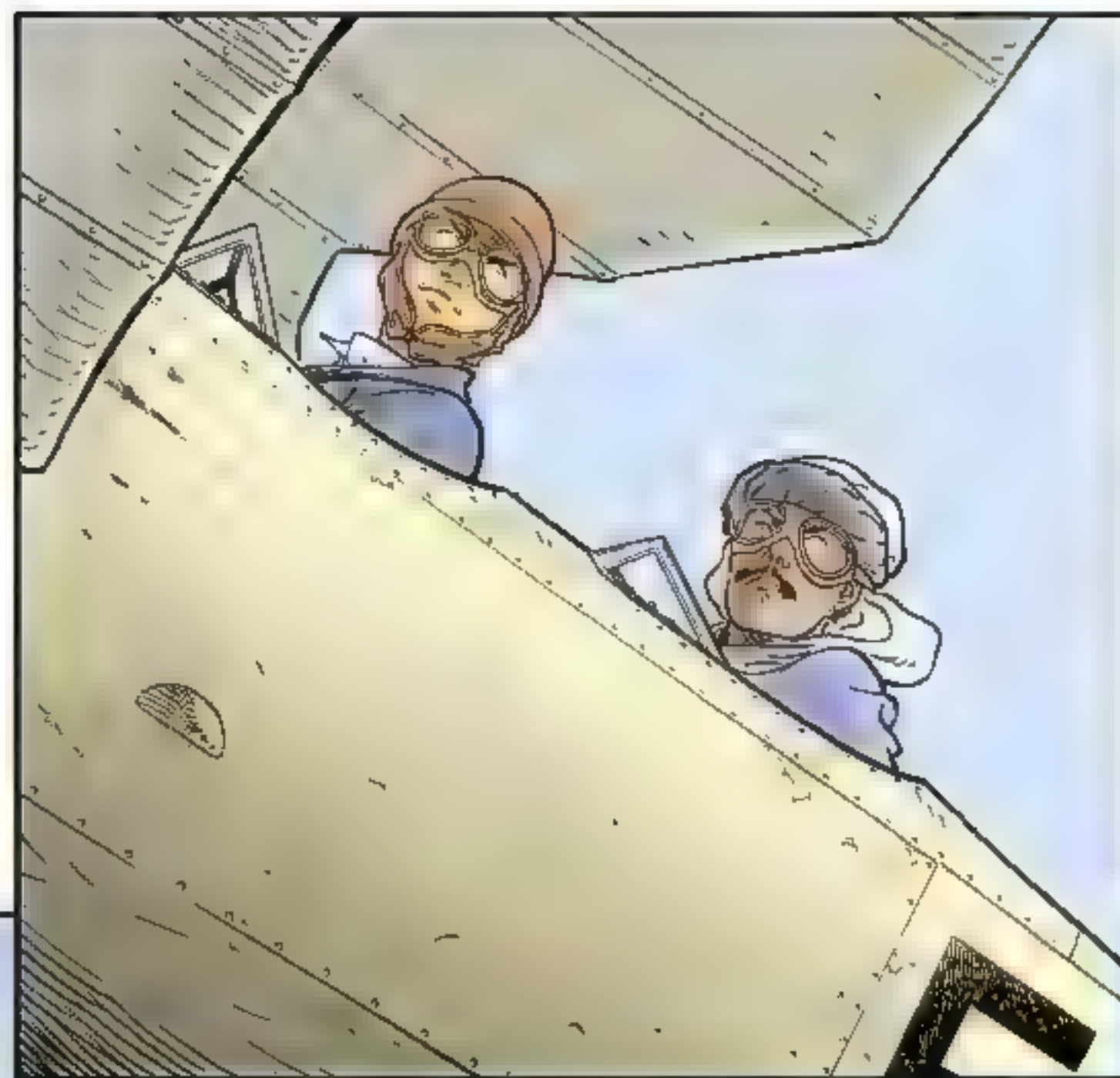
AND IF HIS PLANE WAS THE ONE THAT DIED,
I'D HAVE TO LAND AND TRANSFER THE BAGS
TO MINE. THAT WAS THE AIRMAIL SERVICE
"RELIGION" THAT I'D SO DEVOUTLY CONVERTED
TO! BELIEF DIDN'T MAKE YOU ANY LESS
SCARED, THOUGH!



PET... PET PET...

TOO ROCKY HERE! AND
THE ENGINE'S COUGHING
LIKE A CONSUMPTIVE!

MY ONLY CONSOLATION WAS THAT THE
COMPANY REQUIRED US TO FLY WITH AN
ARAB INTERPRETER. MOUYANE WAS ALL
I HAD IN THE WAY OF LIFE INSURANCE...



PET
TT...
PET...



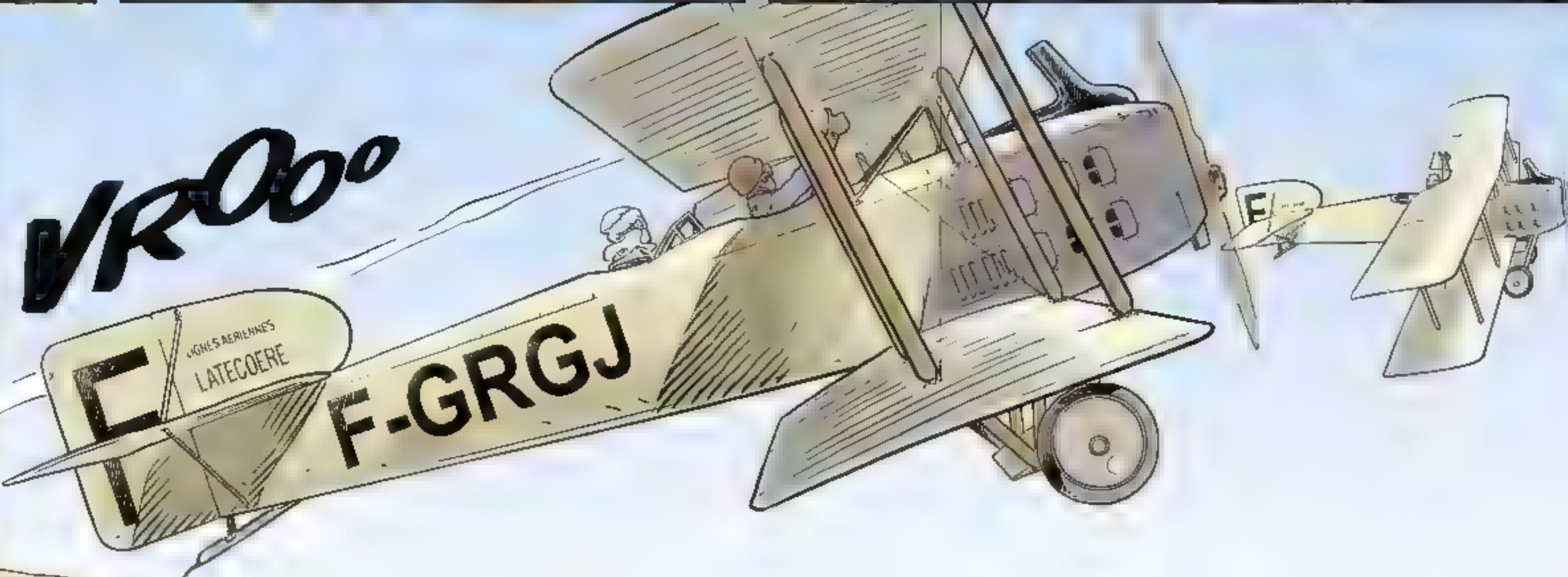
VRRR VRAQUU

WAS IT BECAUSE I'D THOUGHT OF MOUYANE?
AFTER COUGHING AND SPLUTTERING LIKE IT WAS
GIVING UP THE GHOST, THE ENGINE SUDDENLY
SPRANG BACK TO LIFE, AS IF REJUVENATED.

YEAH!
IT'S A
MIRACLE!

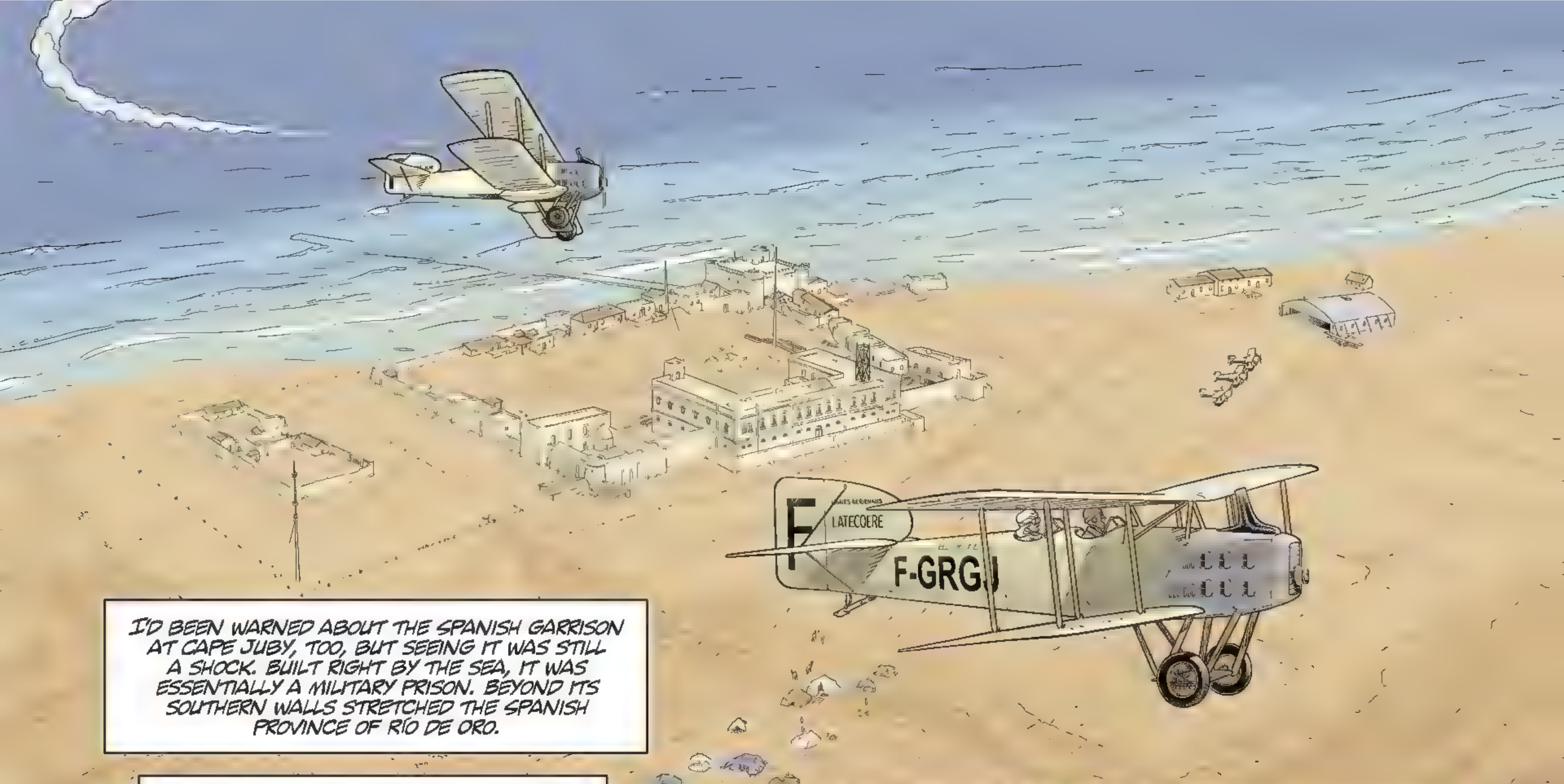
OR SIMPLY A DIRTY
FUEL LINE?

LET'S PULL HER UP NICE
AND SLOW...

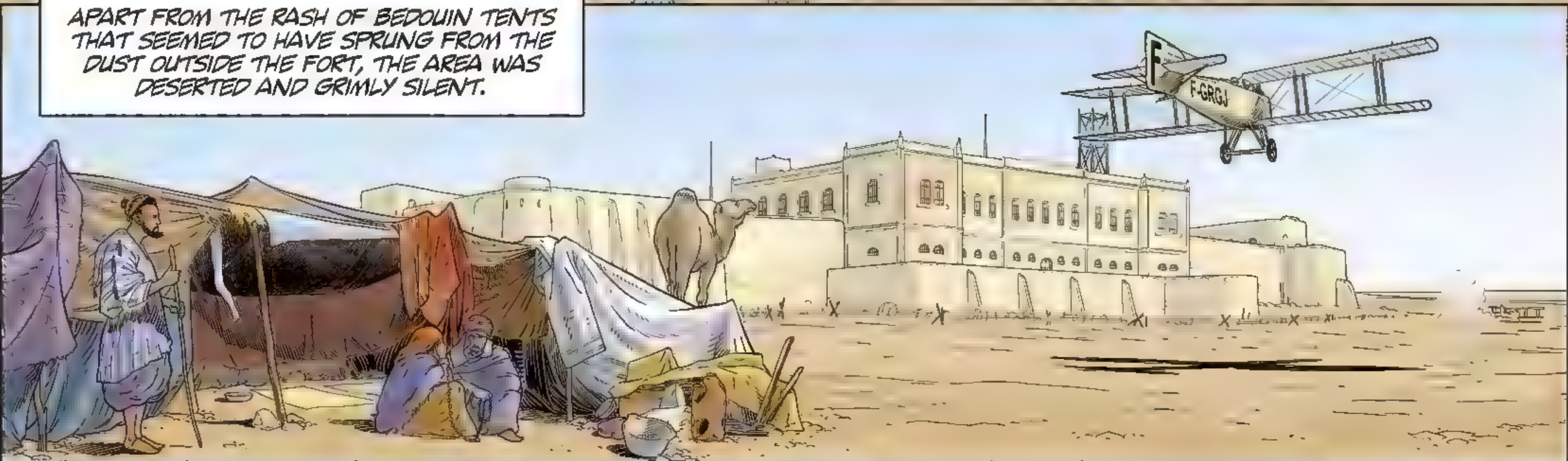


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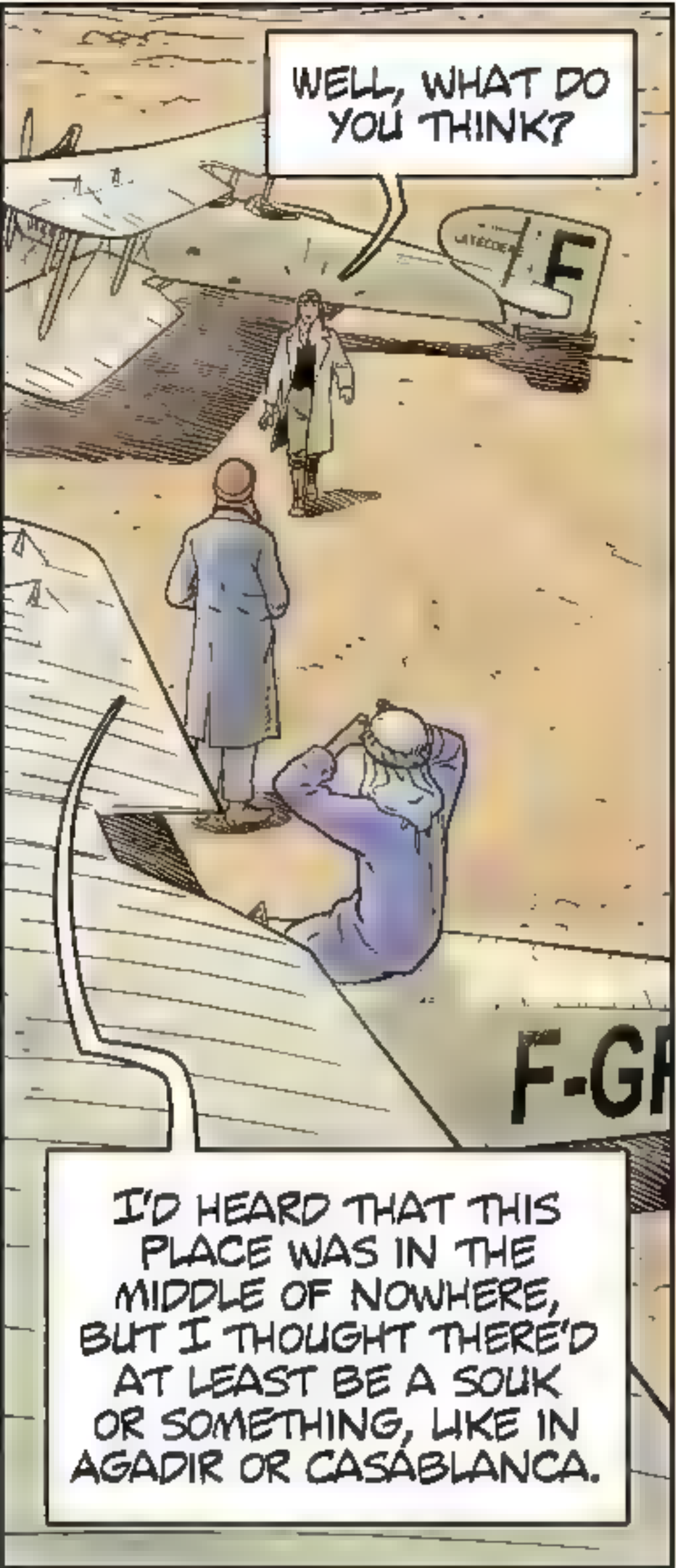
F-GRGJ



I'D BEEN WARNED ABOUT THE SPANISH GARRISON AT CAPE JUBY, TOO, BUT SEEING IT WAS STILL A SHOCK. BUILT RIGHT BY THE SEA, IT WAS ESSENTIALLY A MILITARY PRISON. BEYOND ITS SOUTHERN WALLS STRETCHED THE SPANISH PROVINCE OF RIO DE ORO.

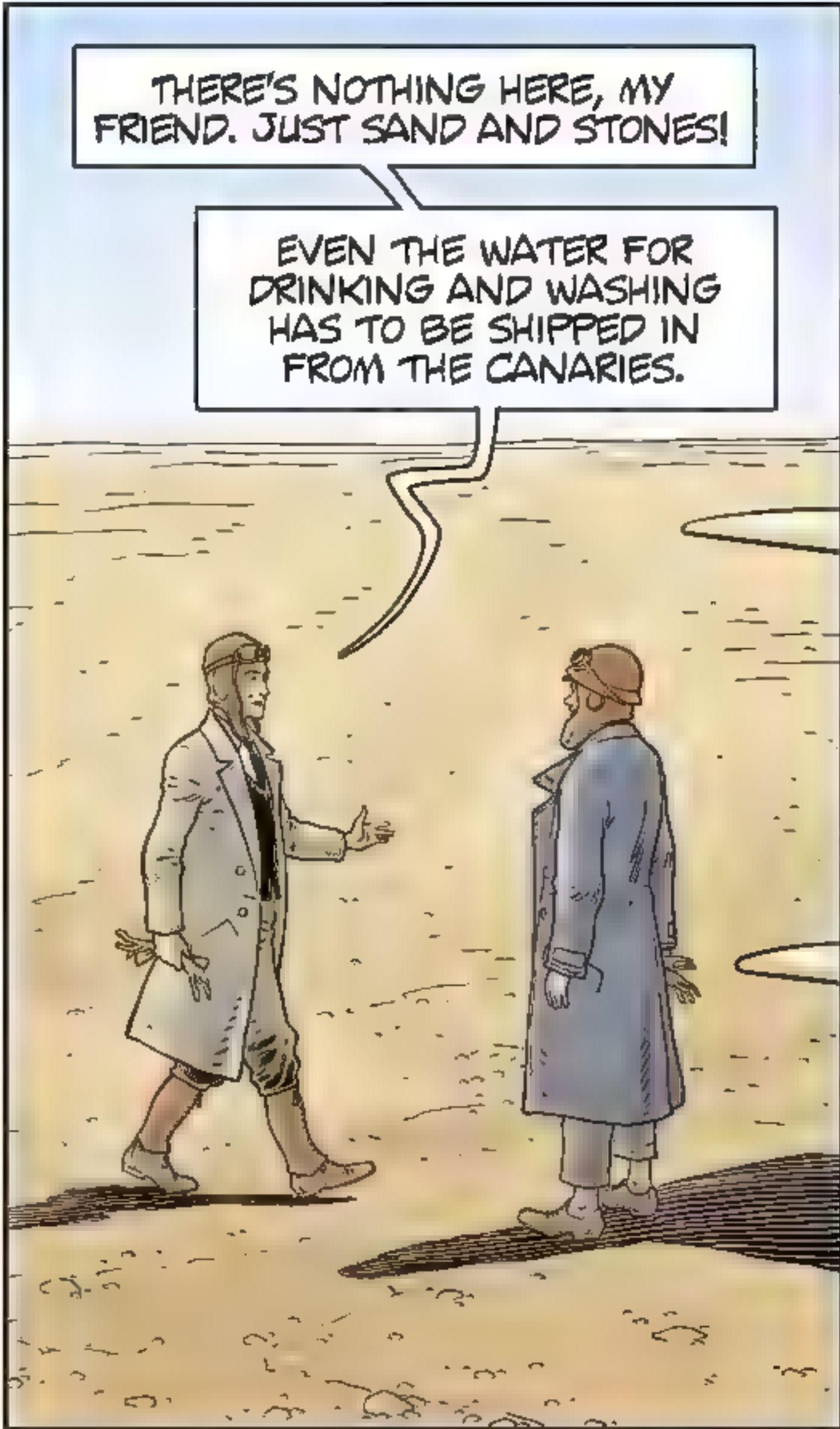


APART FROM THE RASH OF BEDOUIN TENTS THAT SEEMED TO HAVE SPRUNG FROM THE DUST OUTSIDE THE FORT, THE AREA WAS DESERTED AND GRIMLY SILENT.



WELL, WHAT DO YOU THINK?

I'D HEARD THAT THIS PLACE WAS IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE, BUT I THOUGHT THERE'D AT LEAST BE A SOUK OR SOMETHING, LIKE IN AGADIR OR CASABLANCA.

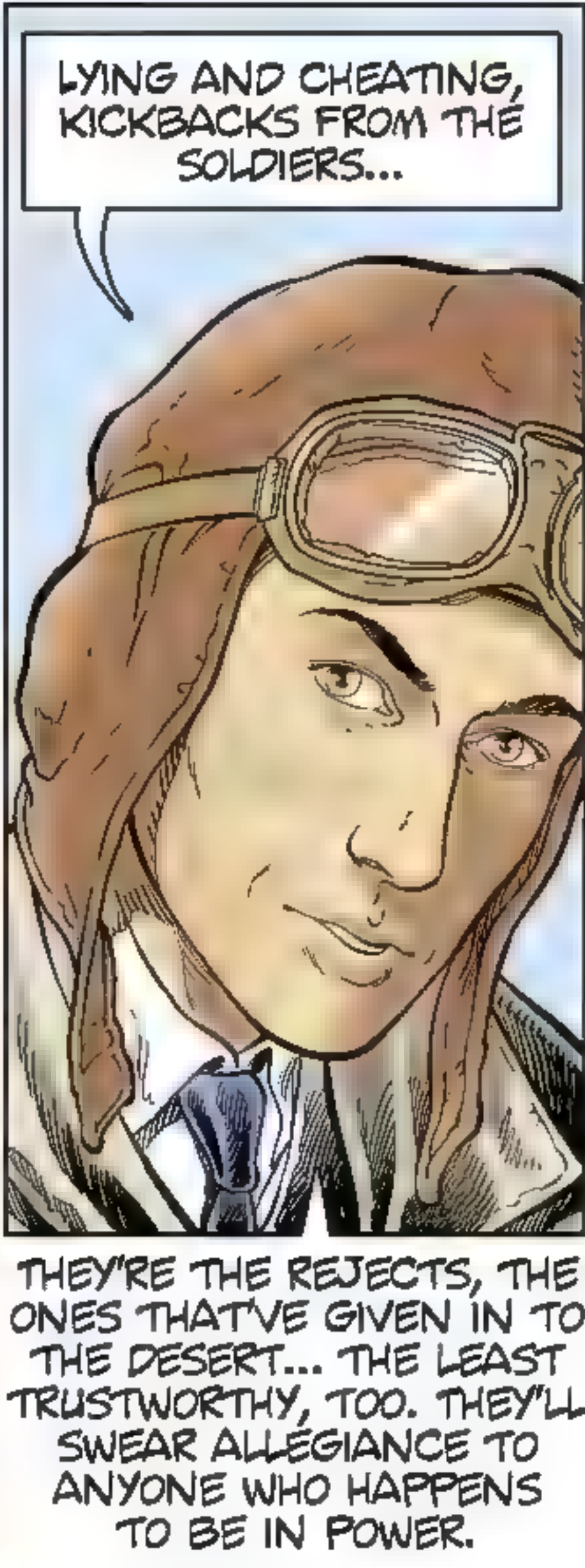


THERE'S NOTHING HERE, MY FRIEND. JUST SAND AND STONES!

EVEN THE WATER FOR DRINKING AND WASHING HAS TO BE SHIPPED IN FROM THE CANARIES.

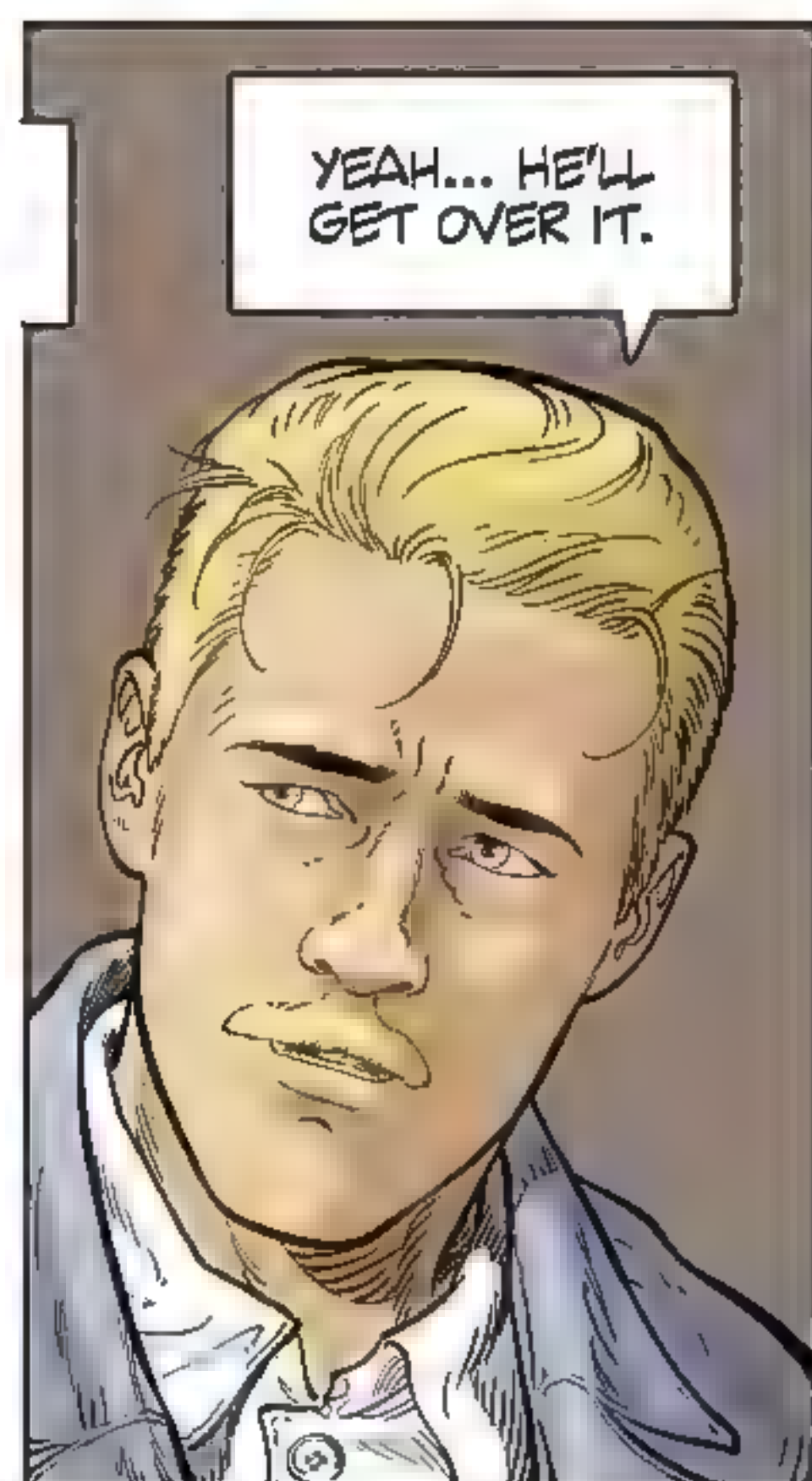
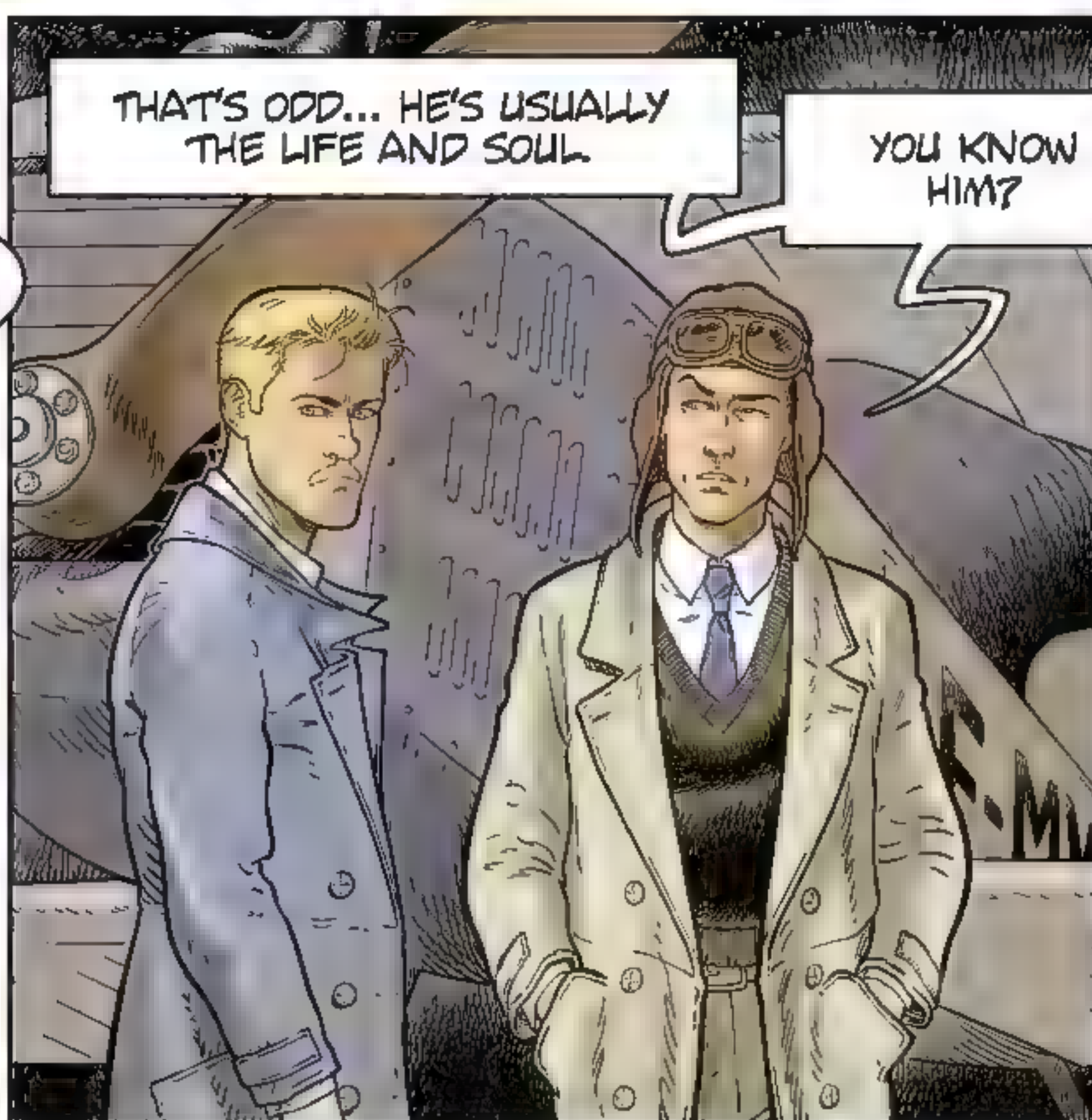
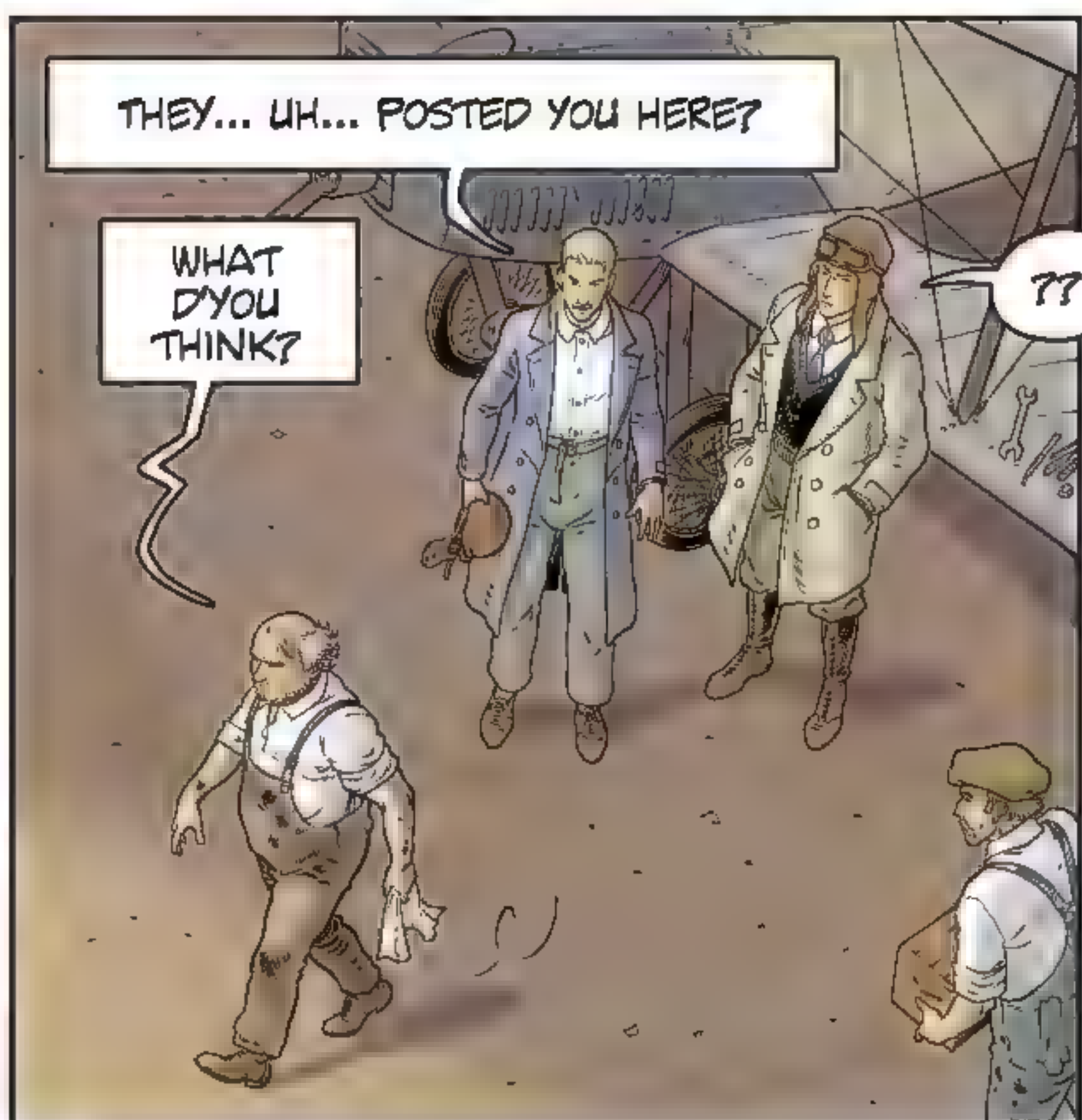
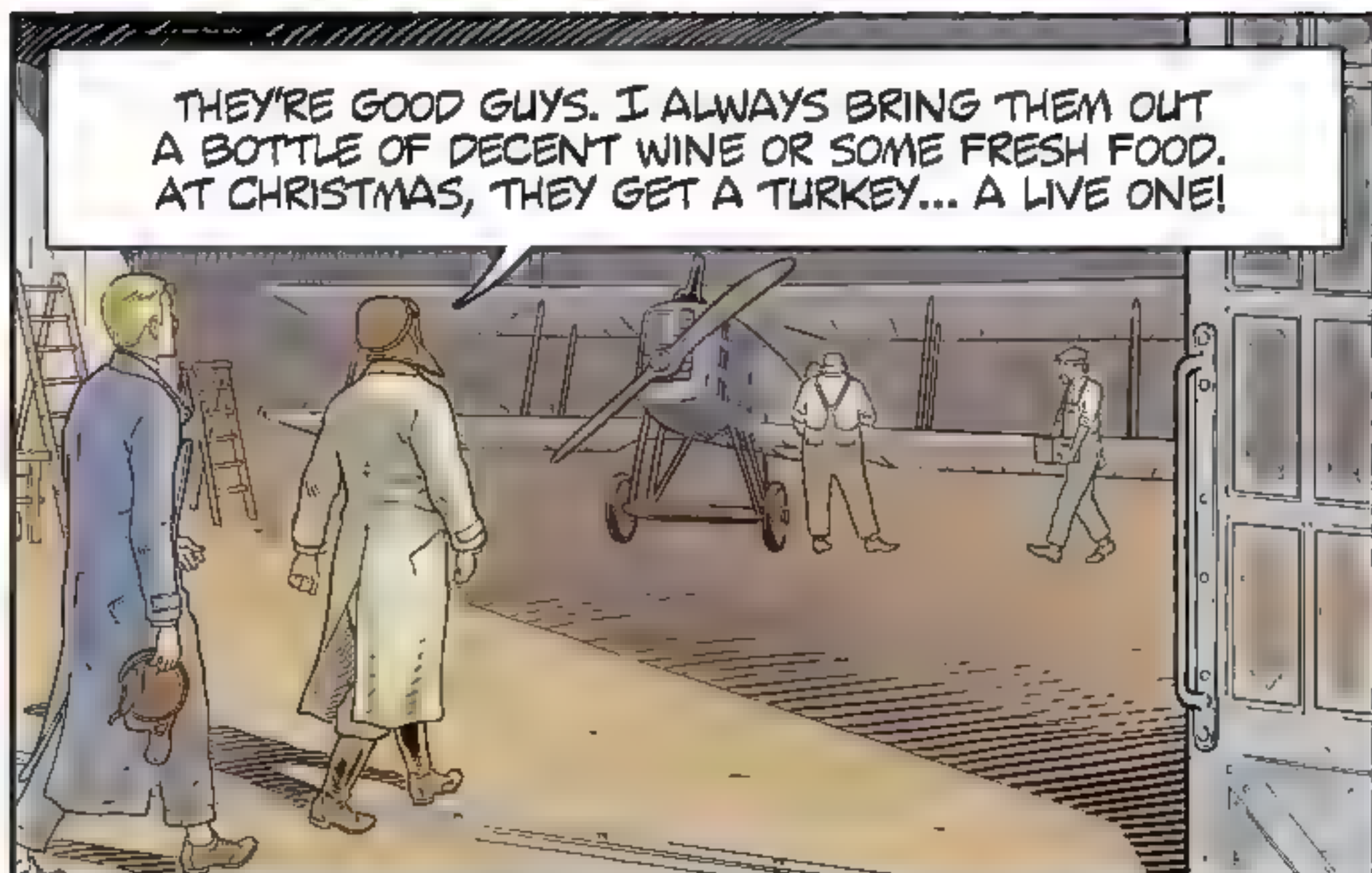
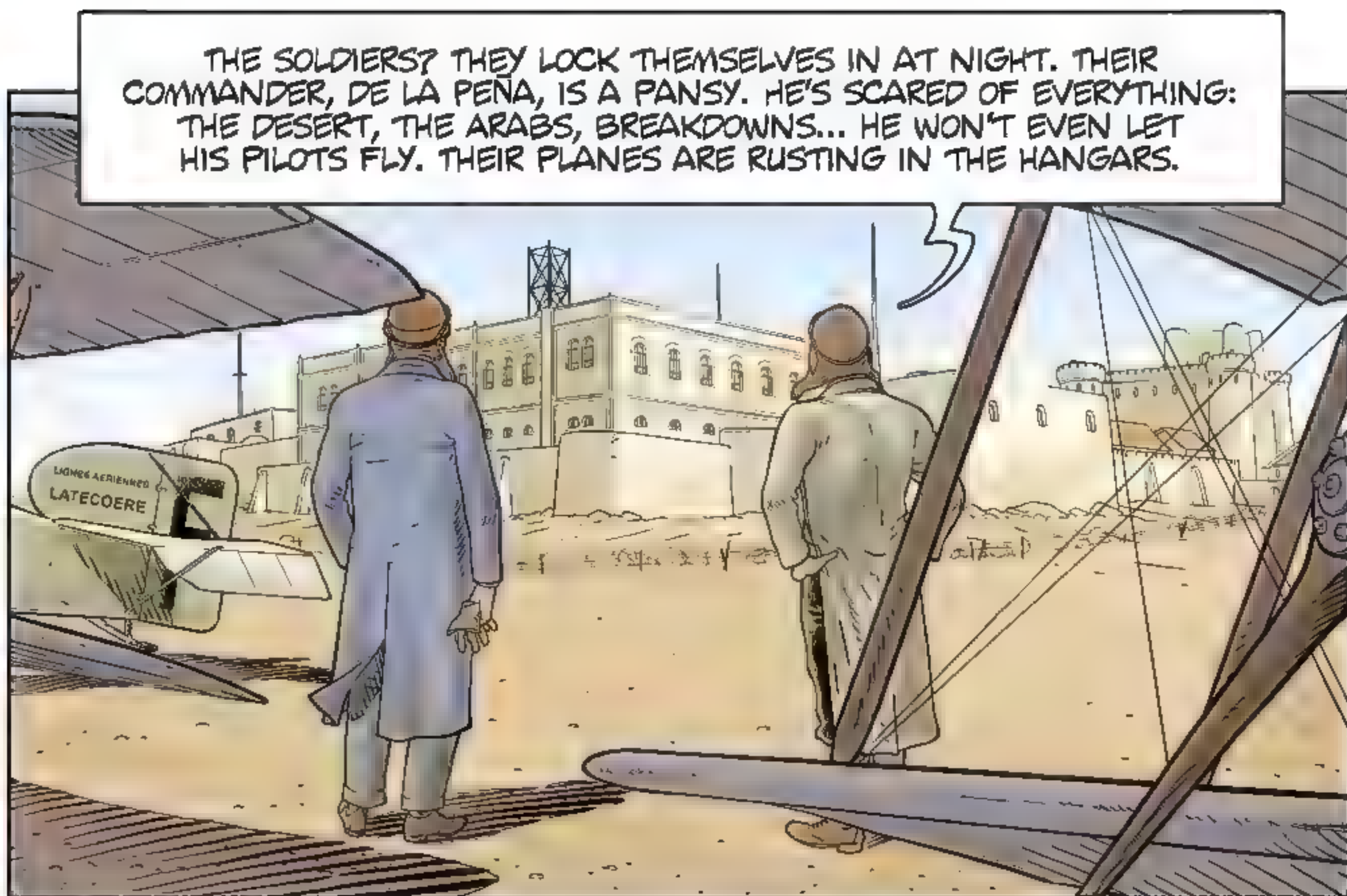


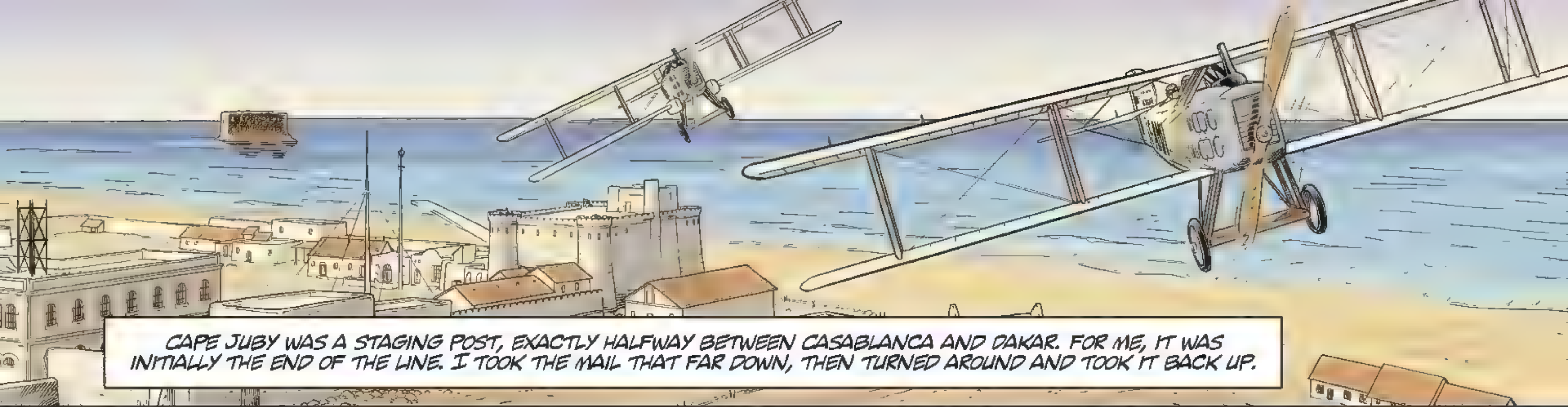
SO WHAT DO THOSE PEOPLE LIVE ON?



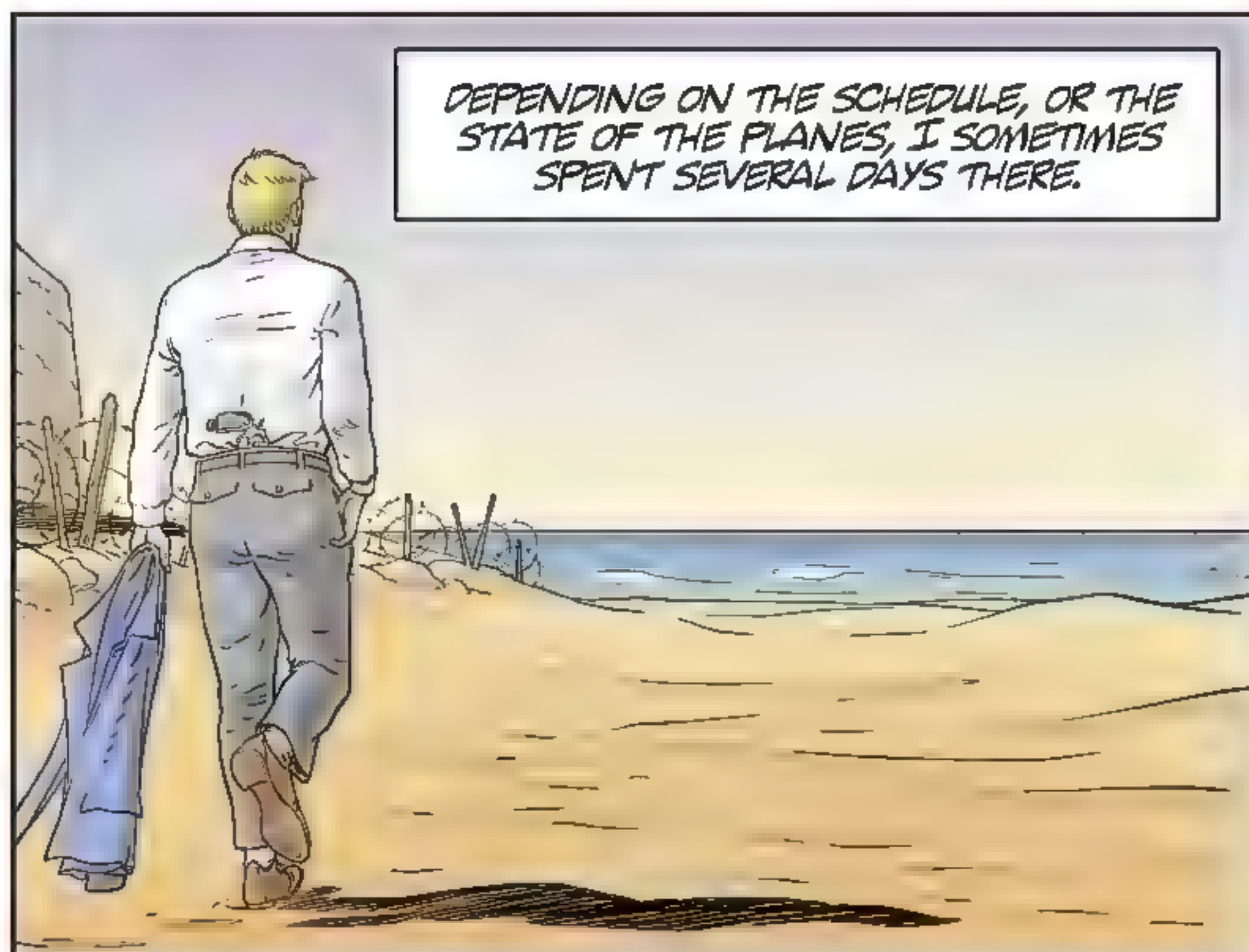
LYING AND CHEATING, KICKBACKS FROM THE SOLDIERS...

THEY'RE THE REJECTS, THE ONES THAT'VE GIVEN IN TO THE DESERT... THE LEAST TRUSTWORTHY, TOO. THEY'LL SWEAR ALLEGIANCE TO ANYONE WHO HAPPENS TO BE IN POWER.

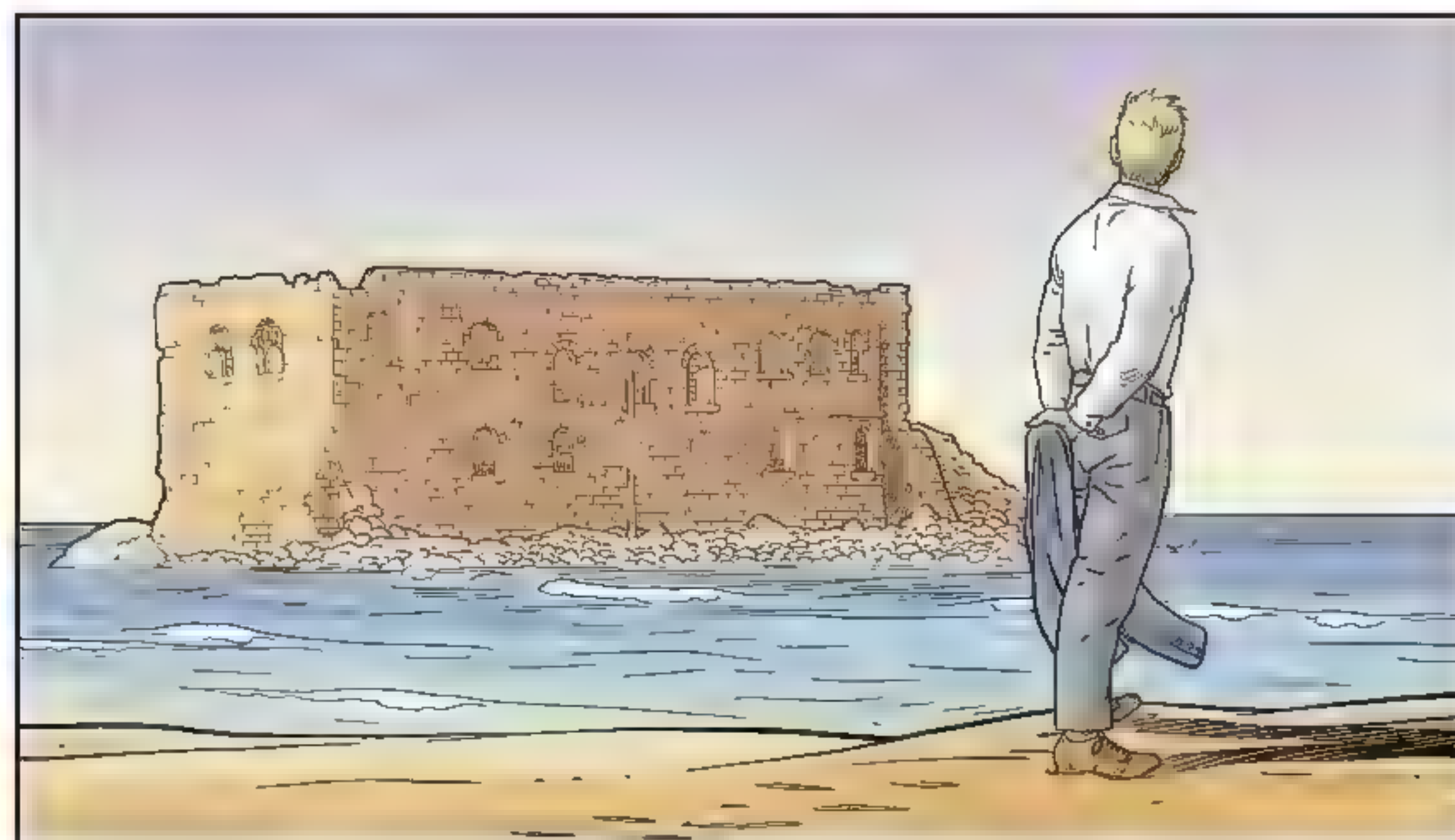




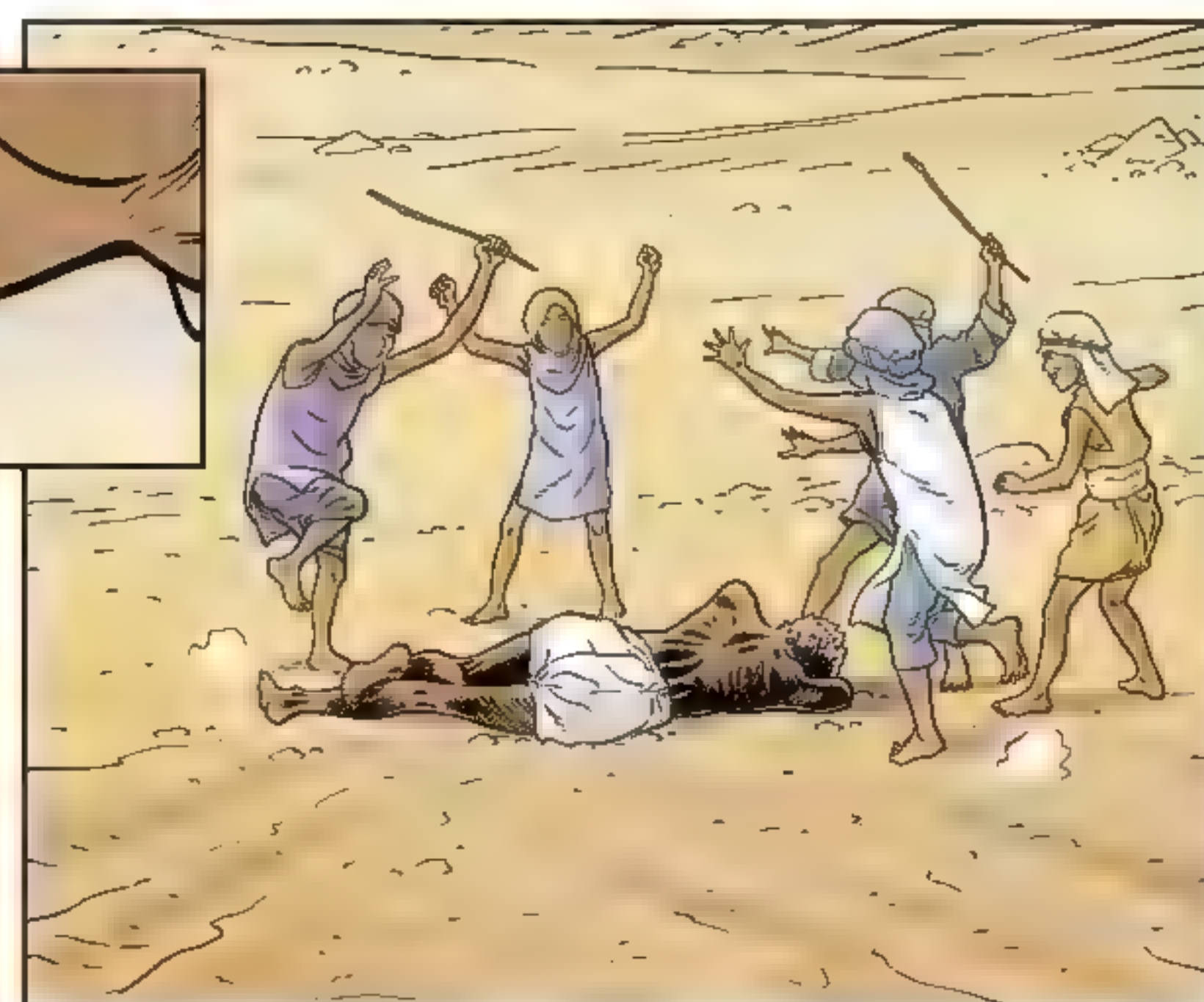
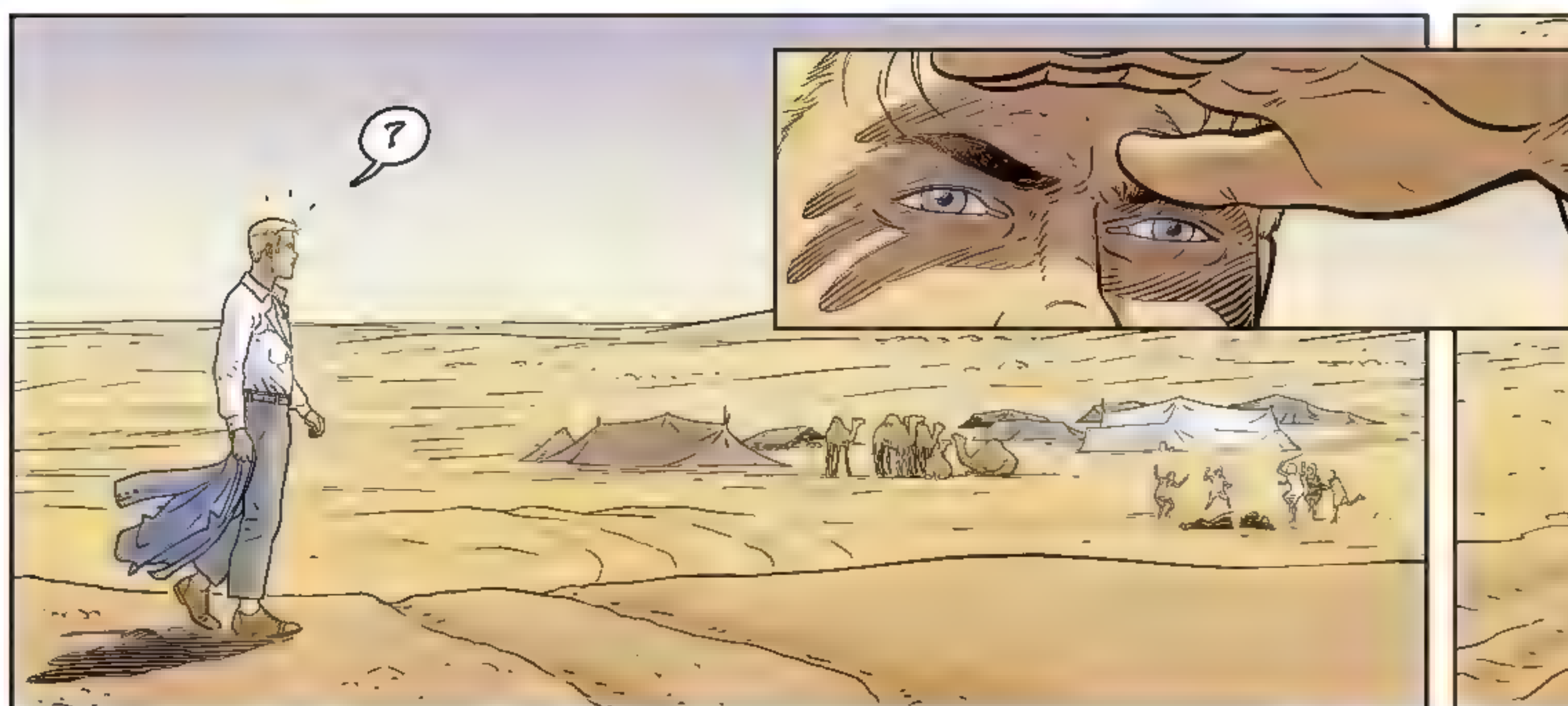
CAPE JUBY WAS A STAGING POST, EXACTLY HALFWAY BETWEEN CASABLANCA AND DAKAR. FOR ME, IT WAS INITIALLY THE END OF THE LINE. I TOOK THE MAIL THAT FAR DOWN, THEN TURNED AROUND AND TOOK IT BACK UP.



DEPENDING ON THE SCHEDULE, OR THE STATE OF THE PLANES, I SOMETIMES SPENT SEVERAL DAYS THERE.

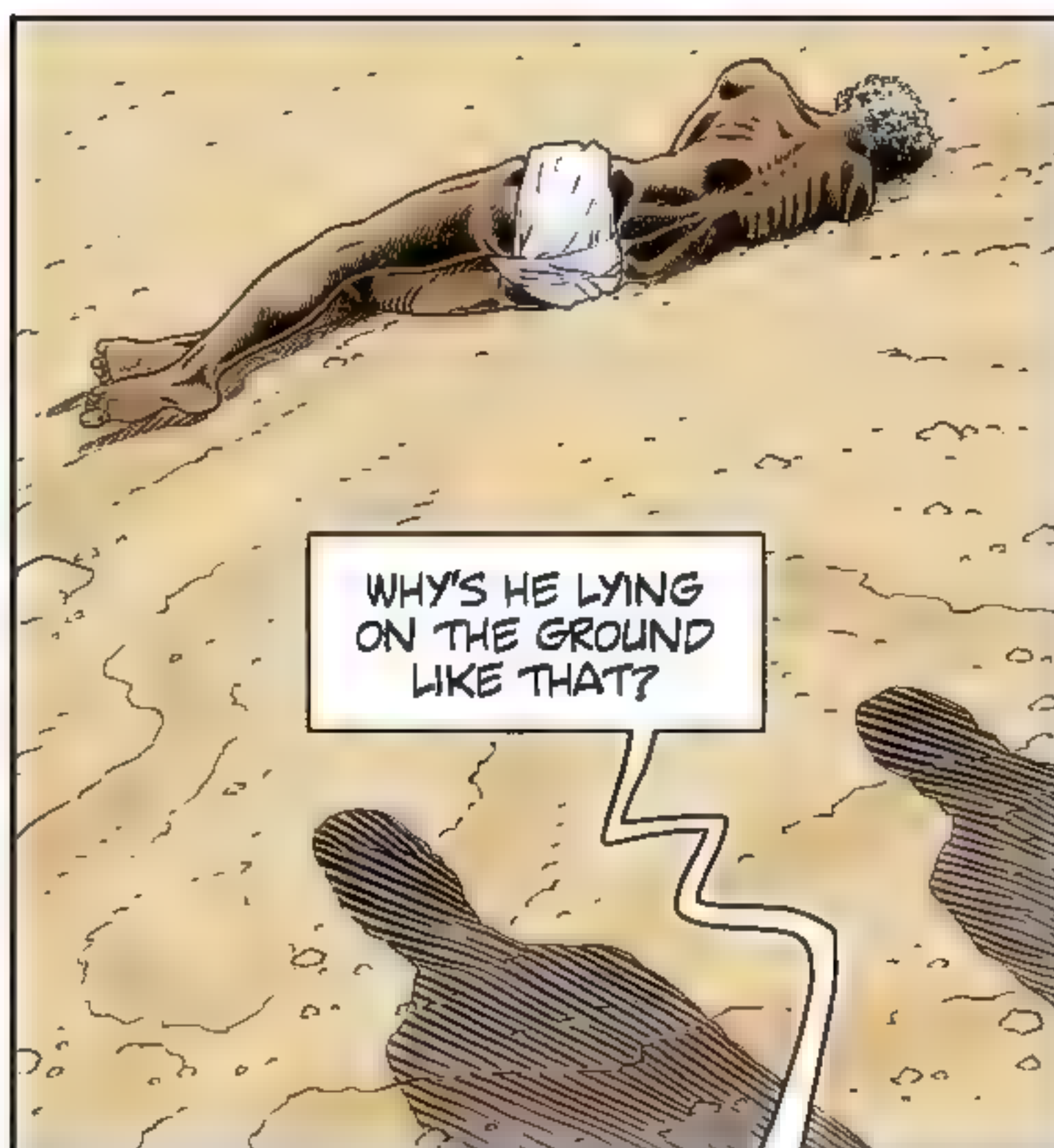


UNLIKE CASABLANCA, WHERE THERE WAS PLENTY TO DO, CAPE JUBY WAS THE EPTOME OF BOREDOM. WORSE, IT WAS LIKE A HUGE, SUFFOCATING VACUUM. EXCEPT FOR THE LAPPING OF THE WAVES, YOU'D HAVE THOUGHT GOD HAD ABANDONED THE PLACE.

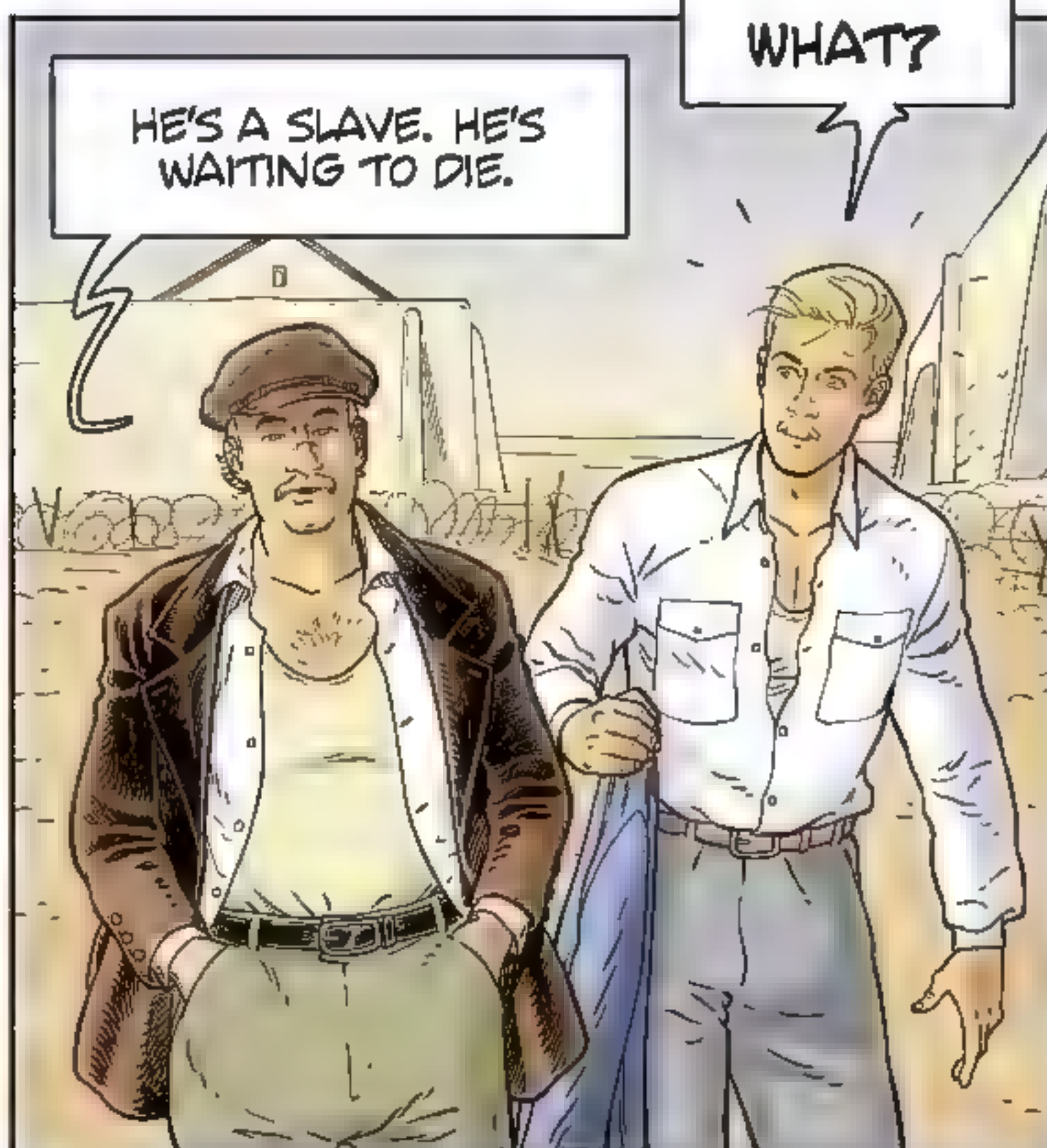


I SAW YOU OUTSIDE THE BARBED WIRE, JOSEF. IT'S DANGEROUS, EVEN IN BROAD DAYLIGHT.





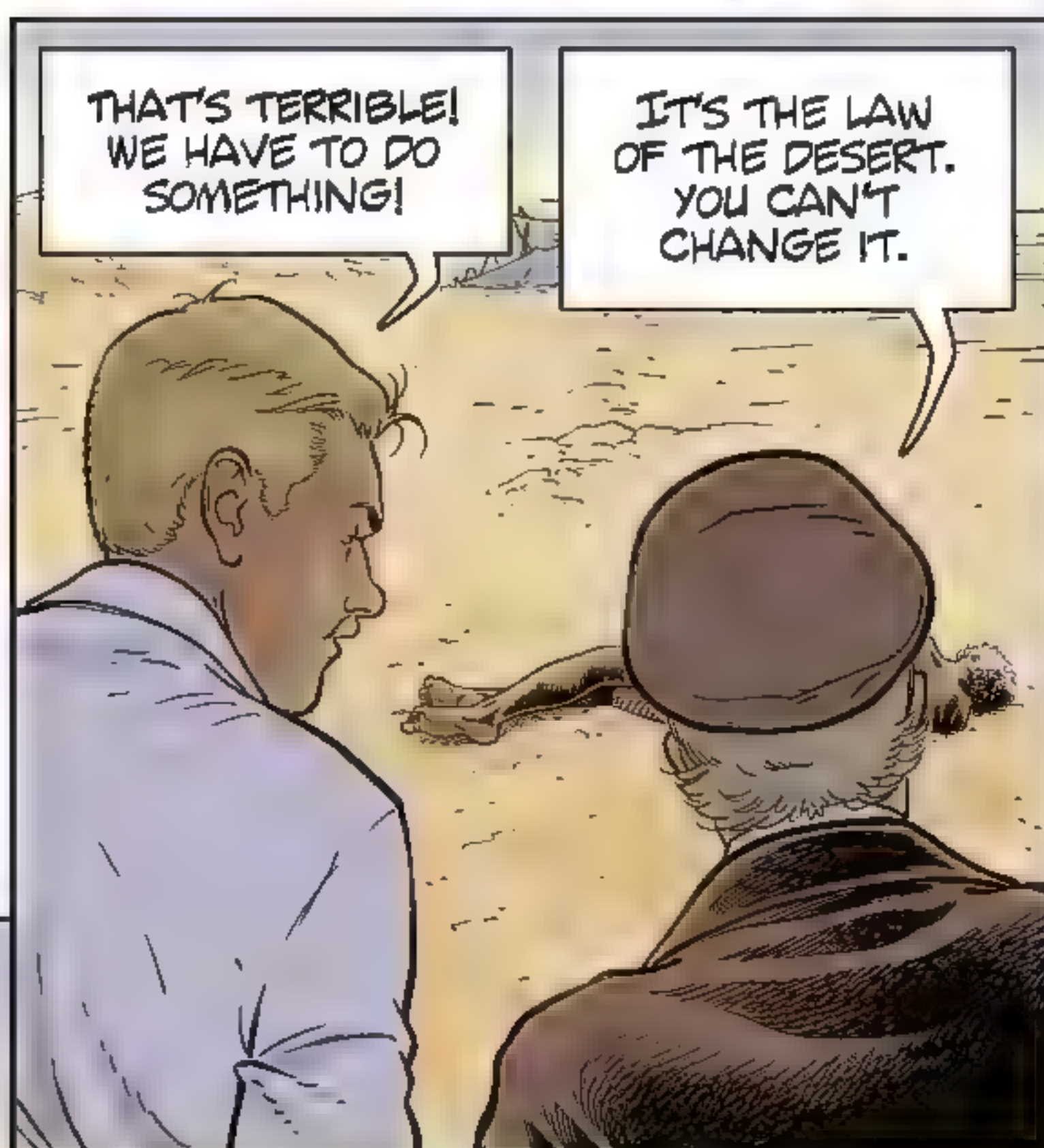
WHY'S HE LYING ON THE GROUND LIKE THAT?



HE'S A SLAVE. HE'S WAITING TO DIE.

WHAT?

HE'S TOO OLD TO WORK, SO HE CAN'T EARN HIS FOOD OR CLOTHING ANYMORE. HE PROBABLY OFFERED HIS SERVICES TO THE OTHER FAMILIES, BUT NO ONE WOULD HAVE HIM.



THAT'S TERRIBLE! WE HAVE TO DO SOMETHING!

IT'S THE LAW OF THE DESERT. YOU CAN'T CHANGE IT.



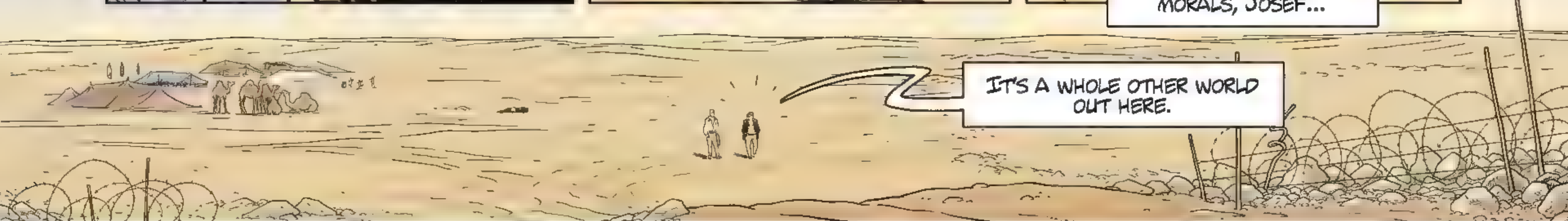
THE BEDOUIN ALL HAVE SLAVES, EVEN THESE REJECTS. MOST OF THEM ARE SENEGALESE. IF A FAMILY HAS A LOT OF SLAVES, IT MEANS THEY'RE WEALTHY.

BUT WE CAN'T LEAVE A MAN OUT IN THE SUN LIKE THAT TO DIE OF THIRST! WE COULD BRING HIM SOME WATER, AT LEAST!



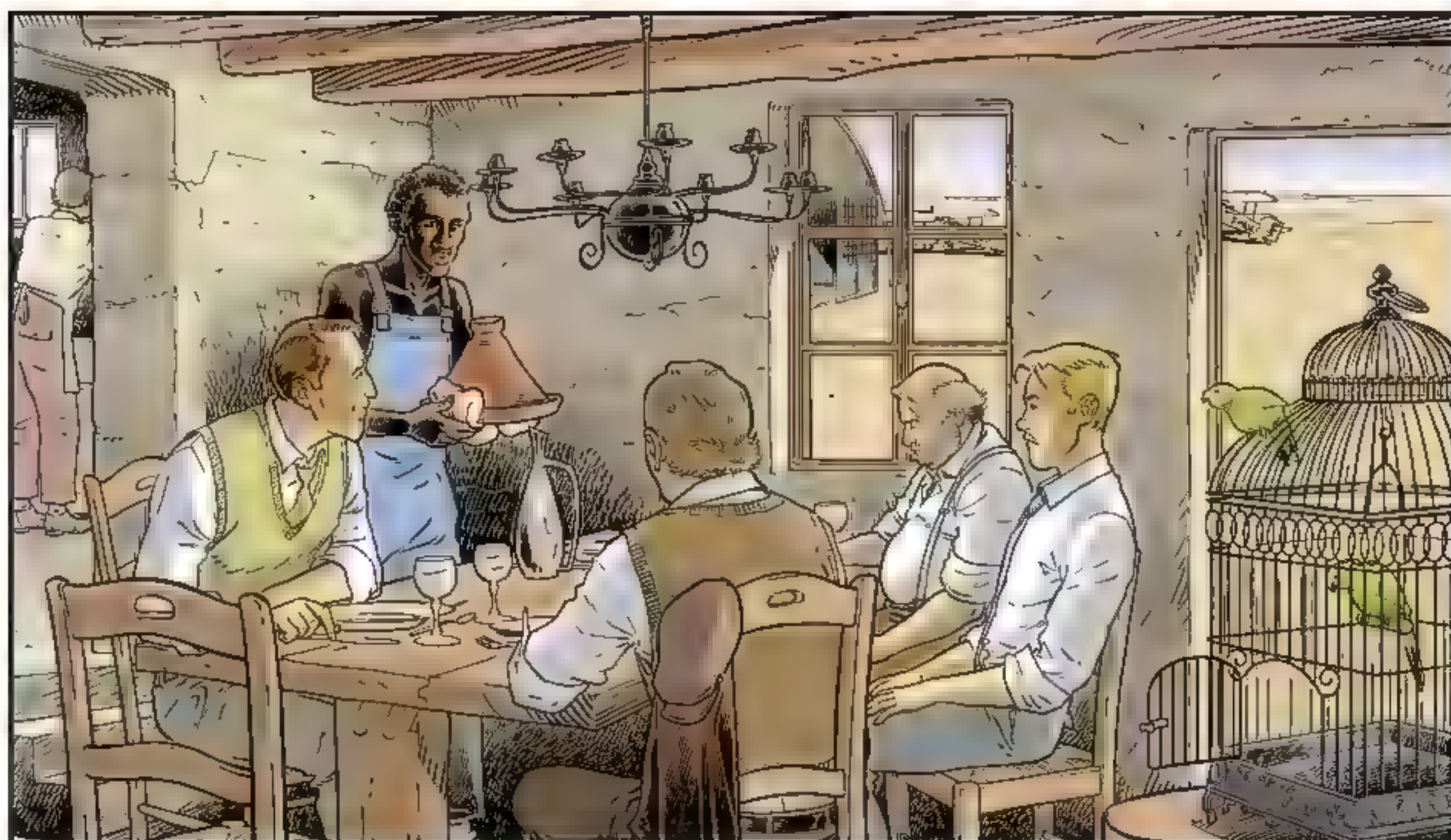
AND PROLONG HIS SUFFERING?

FORGET YOUR CHRISTIAN MORALS, JOSEF...



IT'S A WHOLE OTHER WORLD OUT HERE.

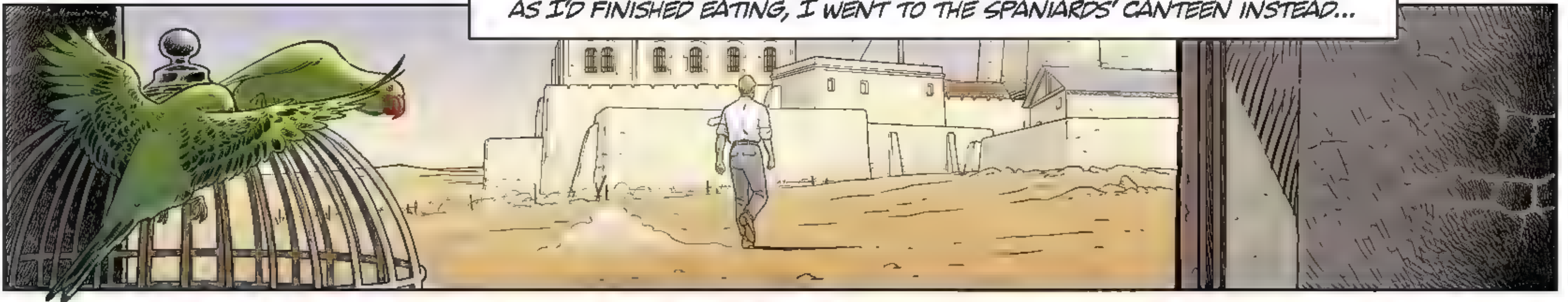
THE THREE PERMANENT MEMBERS OF STAFF--THE MANAGER, VIDAL, AND THE MECHANICS--AND THE PILOTS FLYING IN AND OUT LIVED IN A BUILDING OUTSIDE THE FORT, WHICH WAS AS COMFORTABLE AS IT COULD BE.



UNFORTUNATELY, WHEN I CAME TO SIT DOWN, OSCAR REFUSED TO HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH ME, AND HIS STUBBORN SILENCE EVENTUALLY AFFECTED EVERYONE ELSE.



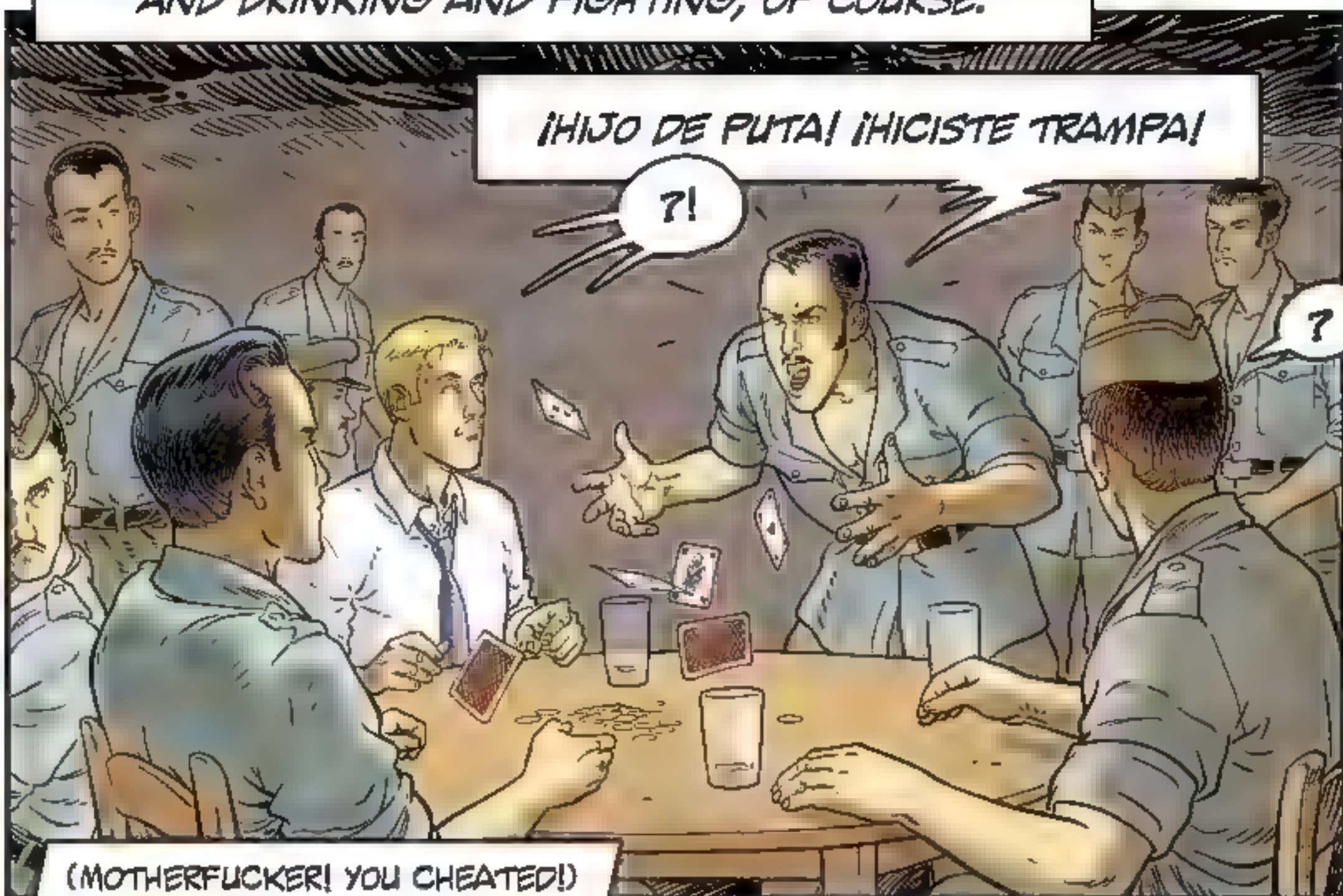
SO AS NOT TO DESECRATE THEIR LITTLE HAVEN OF NORMALITY, AS SOON AS I'D FINISHED EATING, I WENT TO THE SPANIARDS' CANTEN INSTEAD...



...AND JOINED IN THEIR GAMES OF DICE, CARDS, OR DOMINOS, WHICH WERE THE ONLY DISTRACTIONS THOSE POOR DEADBEATS HAD.



AND DRINKING AND FIGHTING, OF COURSE.

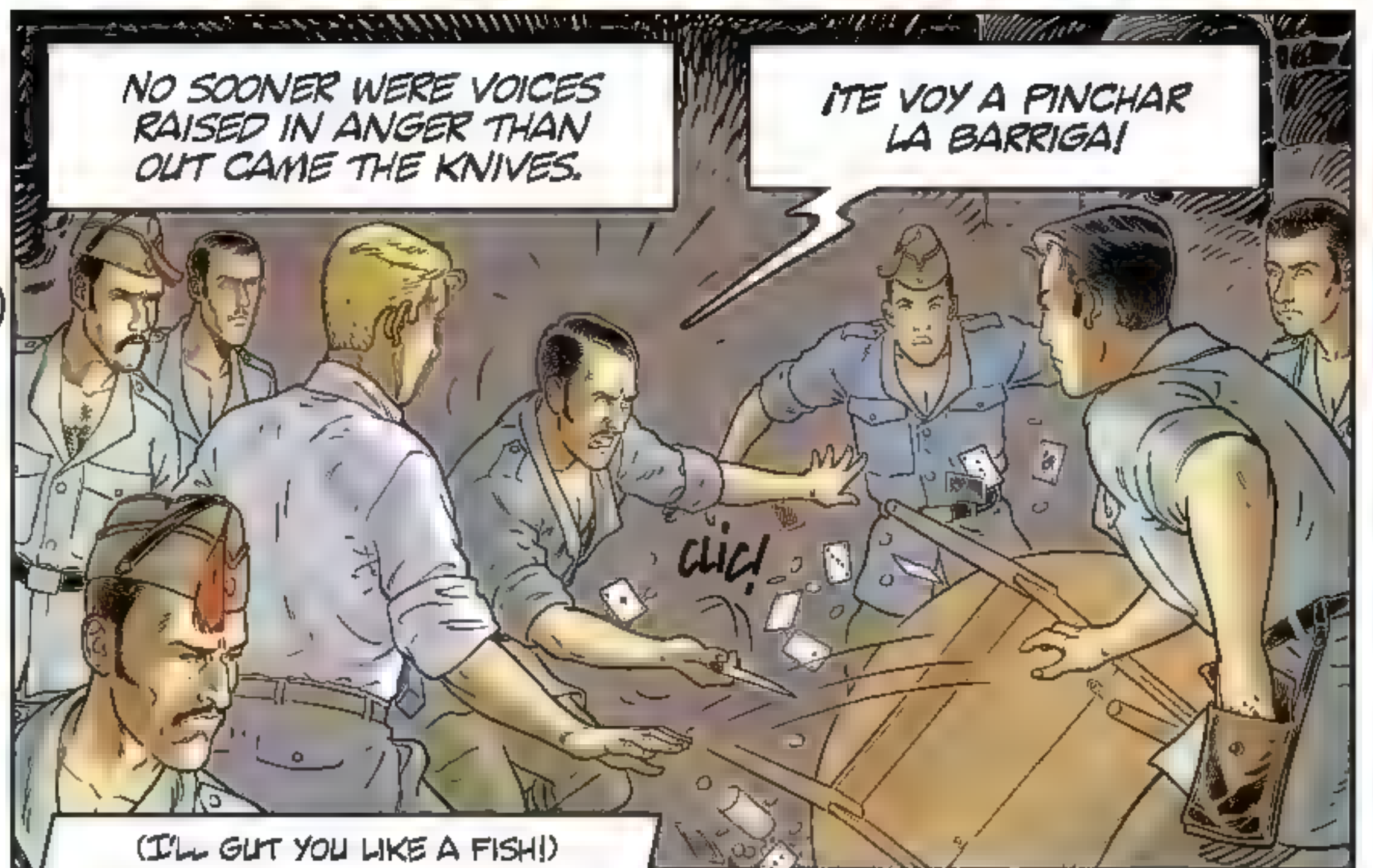


¡HIJO DE PUTA! ¡HICISTE TRAMPA!

?! ?

(MOTHERFUCKER! YOU CHEATED!)

NO SOONER WERE VOICES RAISED IN ANGER THAN OUT CAME THE KNIVES.



¡TE VOY A PINCHAR LA BARRIGA!

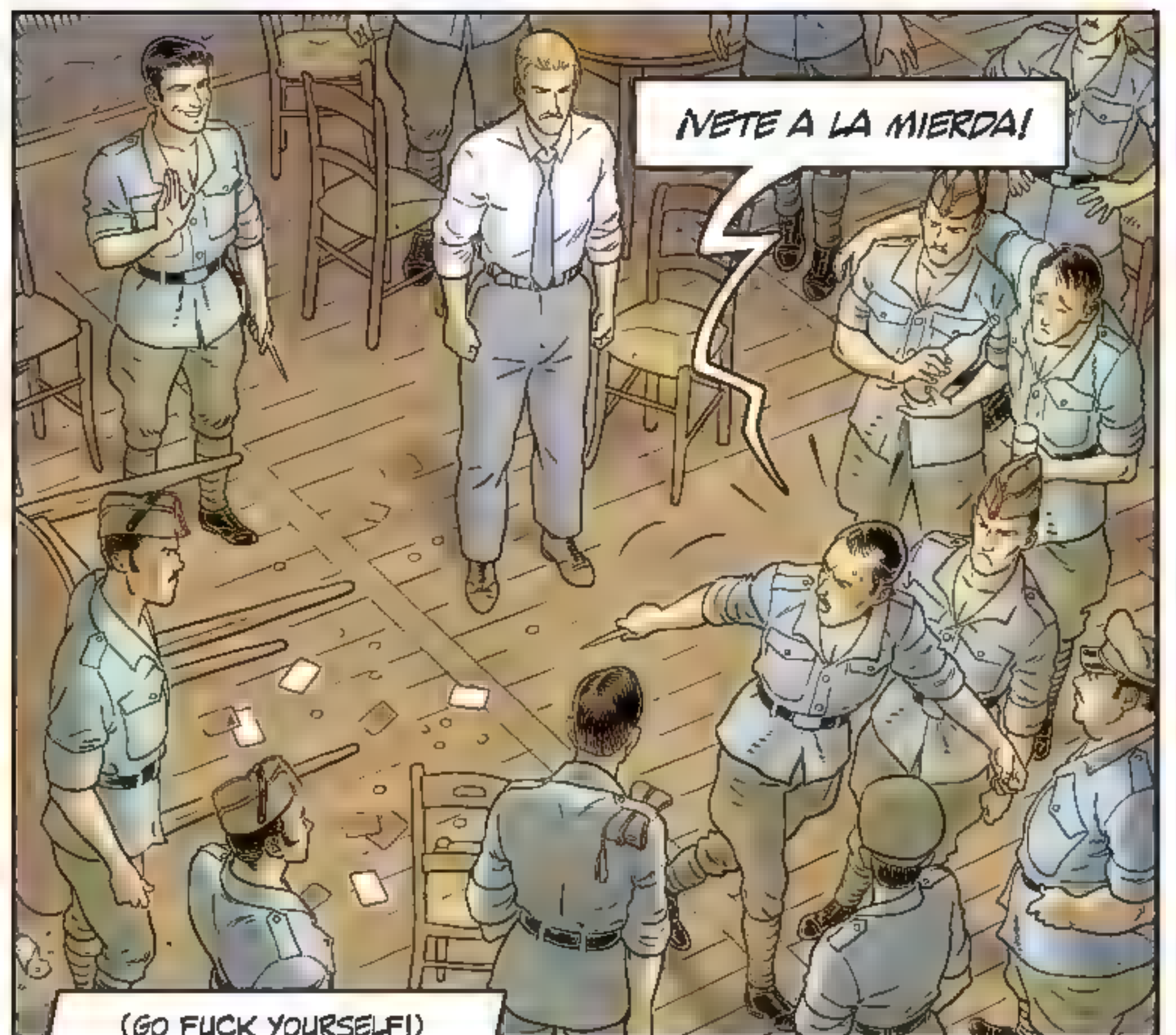
¡Clic!

(I'LL GLUT YOU LIKE A FISH!)

IN A FAIR FIGHT? LIKE YOU DID ROBERTO? AFTER STABBING HIM IN THE BACK IN THE LATRINES?



¡NETE A LA MIERDA!



(GO FUCK YOURSELF!)



I GOT FRIENDLY WITH ONE OF THEM, WHO DRAGGED ME INTO HIS OWN LITTLE GAME.

I THINK YOU JUST MADE ANOTHER FRIEND, ENRIQUE!

I'D SOMETIMES GIVE HIM THE KEYS TO OUR HANGAR SO THAT HE COULD SPEND THE NIGHT THERE WITH AN ARAB GIRL, WHO WASN'T ALLOWED INTO THE FORT.



A BED OF STONES OUTSIDE WAS LESS COMFORTABLE AND MUCH LESS SAFE--THE TRIBESMEN WOULDN'T HAVE APPROVED.

JOSEF, I CAN TRUST YOU... AND I NEED YOUR HELP.

??



TO GET INTO THE HANGAR?

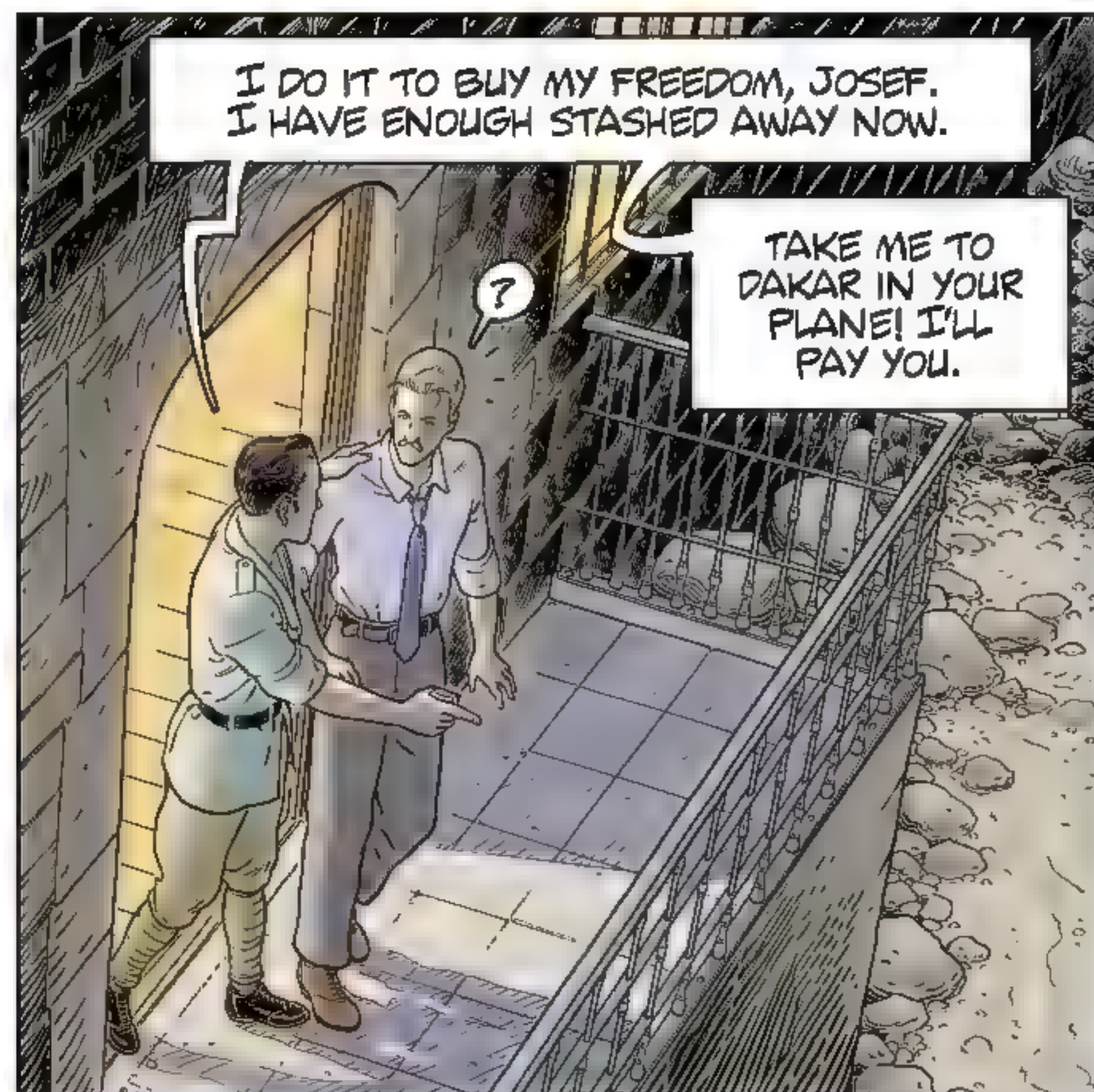
SÍ, PERO...

...FOR SOMETHING ELSE.

IF I STAY HERE, I'M DEAD. ANDRES ISN'T THE ONLY ONE GUNNING FOR ME.



OF COURSE--YOU WIN TOO OFTEN, ENRIQUE. IT'S DANGEROUS.



I DO IT TO BUY MY FREEDOM, JOSEF. I HAVE ENOUGH STASHED AWAY NOW.

TAKE ME TO DAKAR IN YOUR PLANE! I'LL PAY YOU.



YOU WANT TO DESERT?

SHHHHH

NOT MANY OF THEM UNDERSTAND YOU, BUT PLEASE BE CAREFUL.

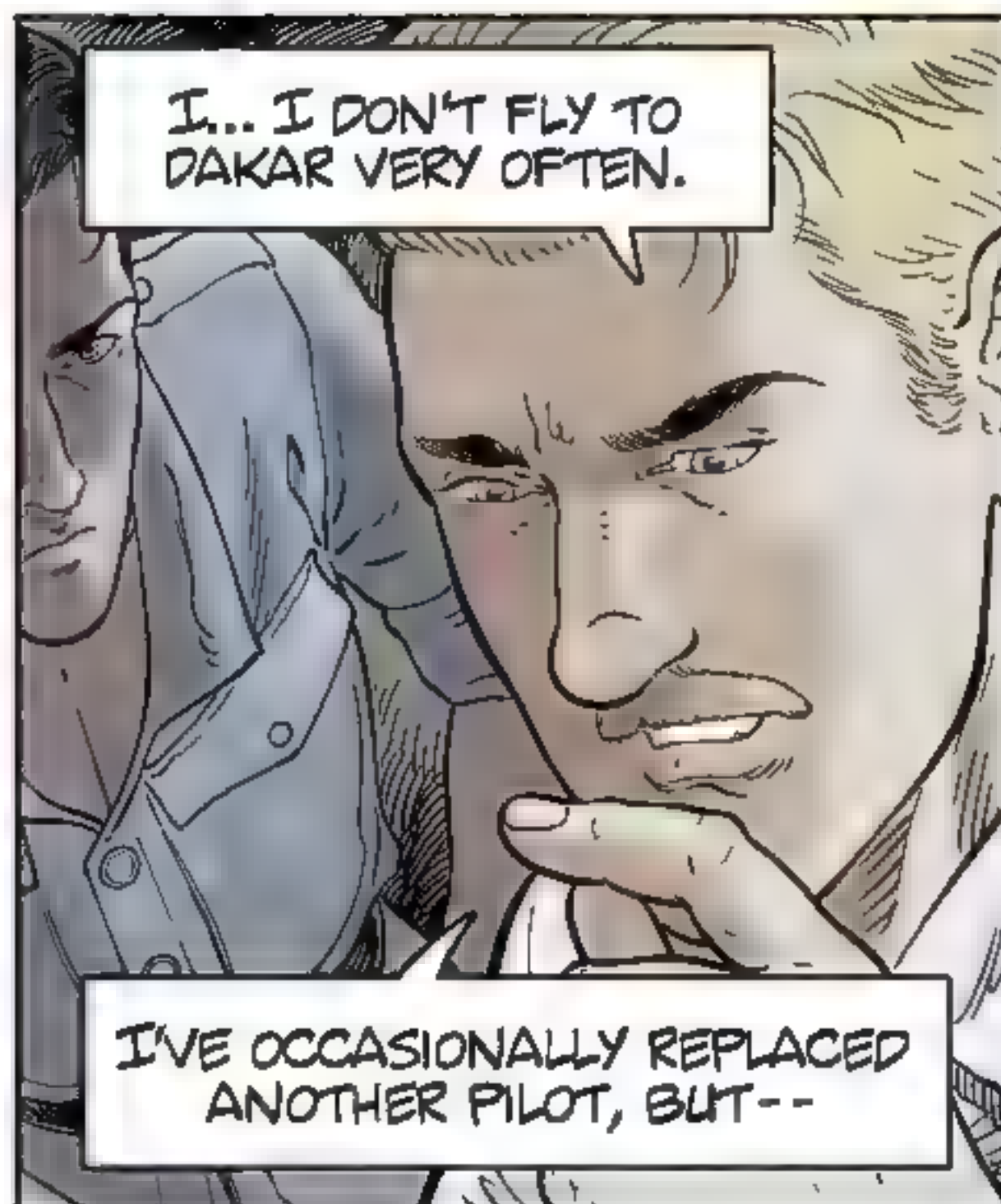


I HAVE THREE MORE YEARS TO SERVE, AND I REFUSE TO DIE IN THIS SHITHOLE.

YOU'RE ASKING A LOT, ENRIQUE.

I COULD LOSE MY JOB.

I'LL PAY YOU WELL... VERY WELL, IF NECESSARY.

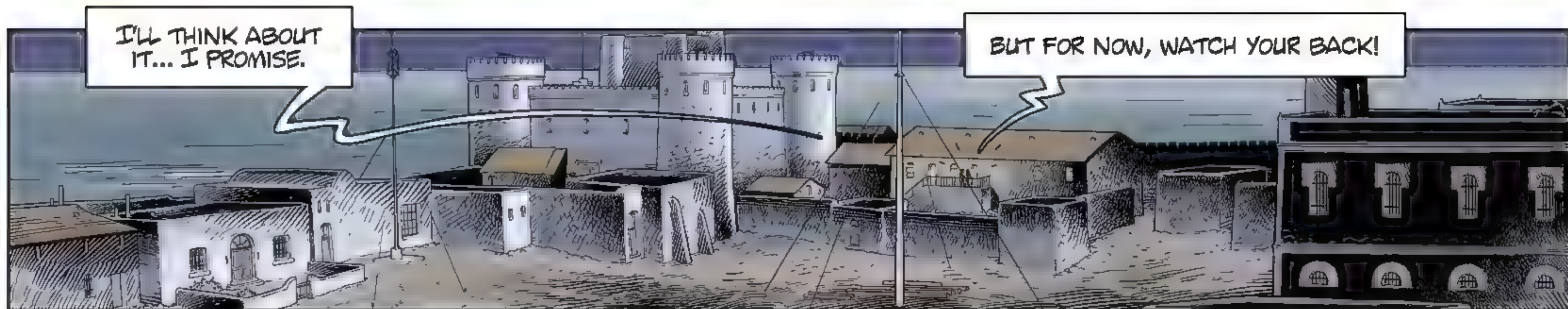


I... I DON'T FLY TO DAKAR VERY OFTEN.

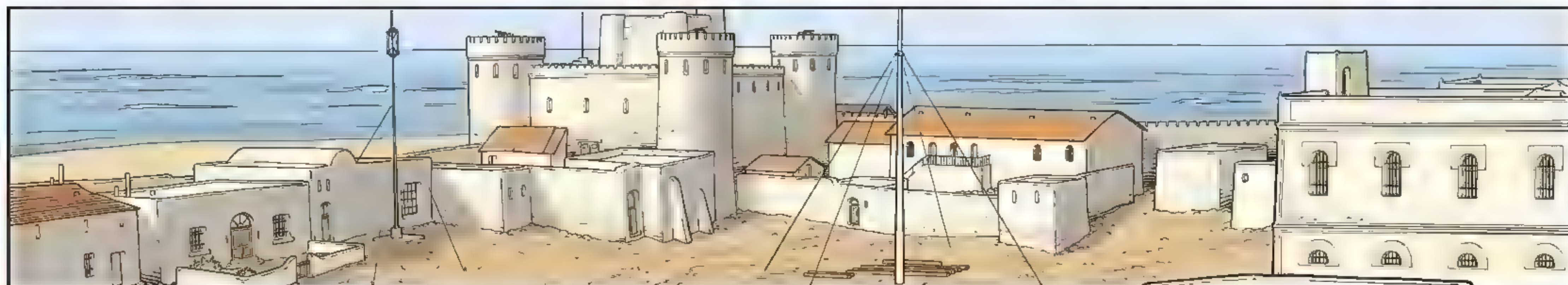
I'VE OCCASIONALLY REPLACED ANOTHER PILOT, BUT--



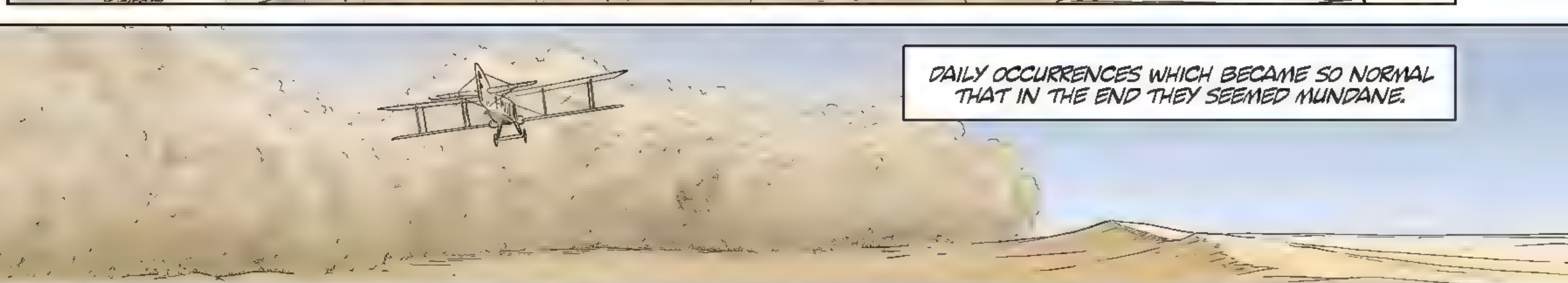
I BEG YOU, JOSEF.



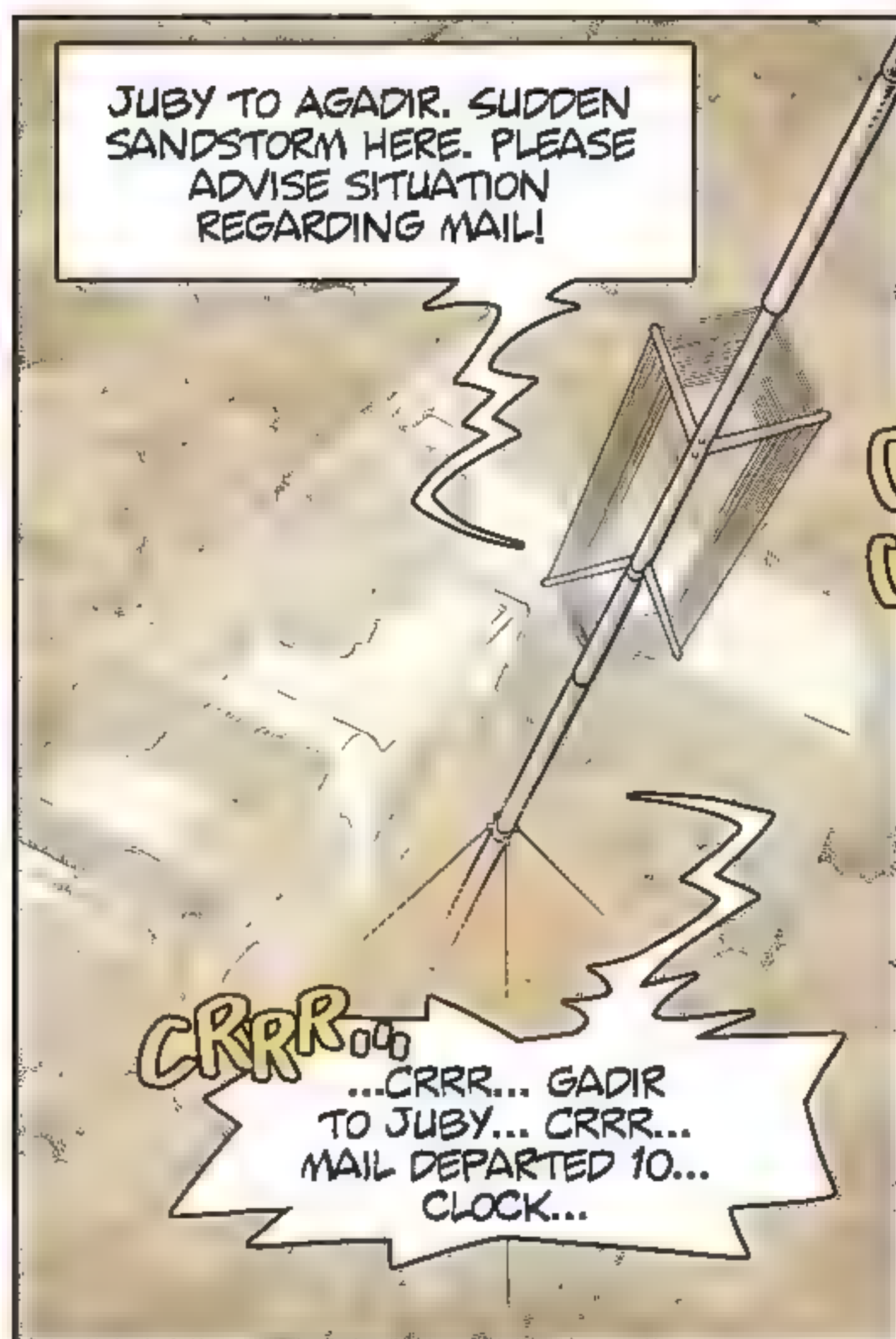
SEVERAL WEEKS WENT BY, PUNCTUATED BY ALL THE VICISSITUDES OF A LIFE DEDICATED TO THE DELIVERY OF AIRMAIL. ENGINE FAILURES, PILOTS LOST AND FOUND... OR CAPTURED BY THE BEDOUIN AND FREED IN EXCHANGE FOR A RANSOM PAYMENT--SOMETIMES.



DAILY OCCURRENCES WHICH BECAME SO NORMAL THAT IN THE END THEY SEEMED MUNDANE.



BUT WHEN THE ELEMENTS CONSPIRED AGAINST US TO GROUND OUR PLANES, ALL WE COULD DO WAS DANCE AROUND THE WIRELESS LIKE SAVAGES APPEALING TO THEIR GODS FOR A FAVORABLE PROPHECY.



WITH THE GENERATOR HUMMING IN THE BACKGROUND, THIS PIECE OF TECHNOLOGICAL WIZARDRY CONVEYED NEWS OF EVERY PILOT'S FATE ALL THE WAY FROM TOULOUSE TO DAKAR.

JUBY TO AGADIR. MAIL NOT YET ARRIVED.

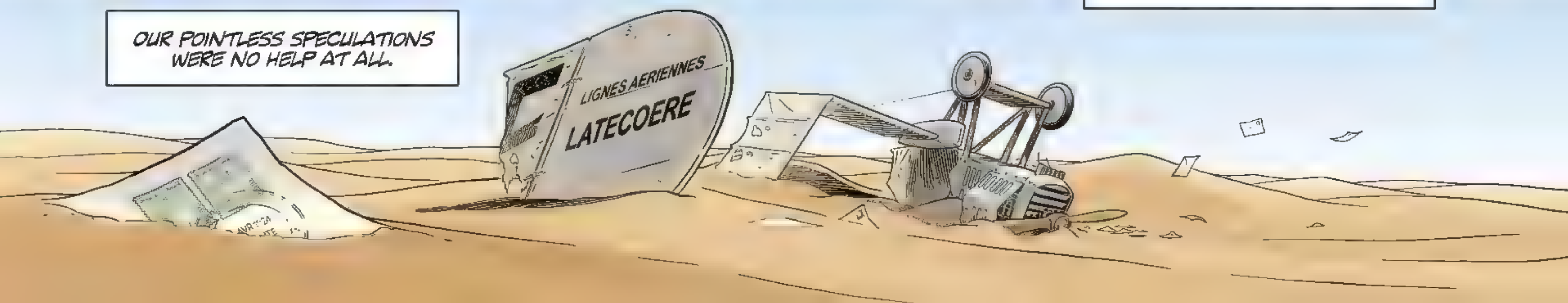


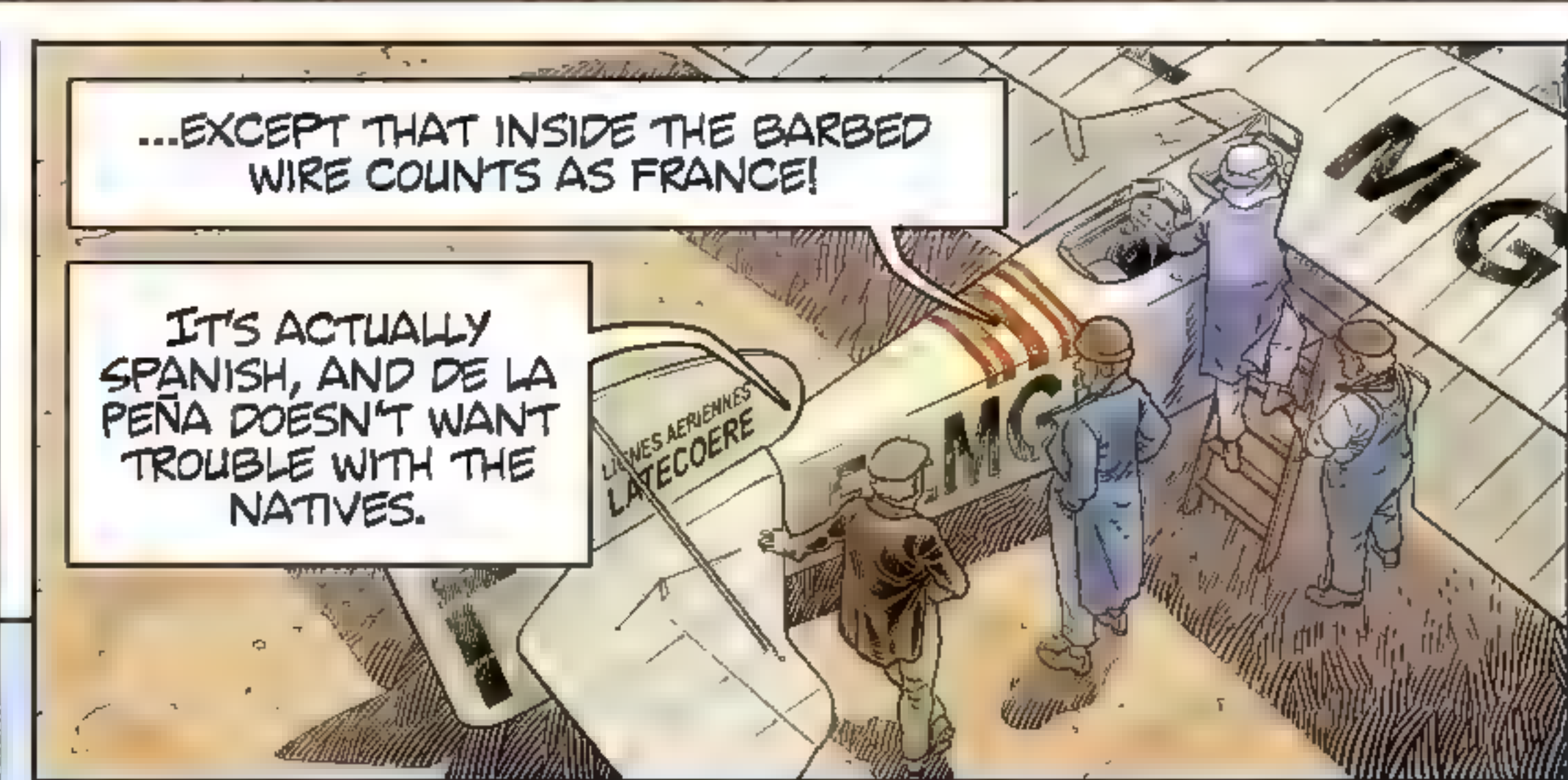
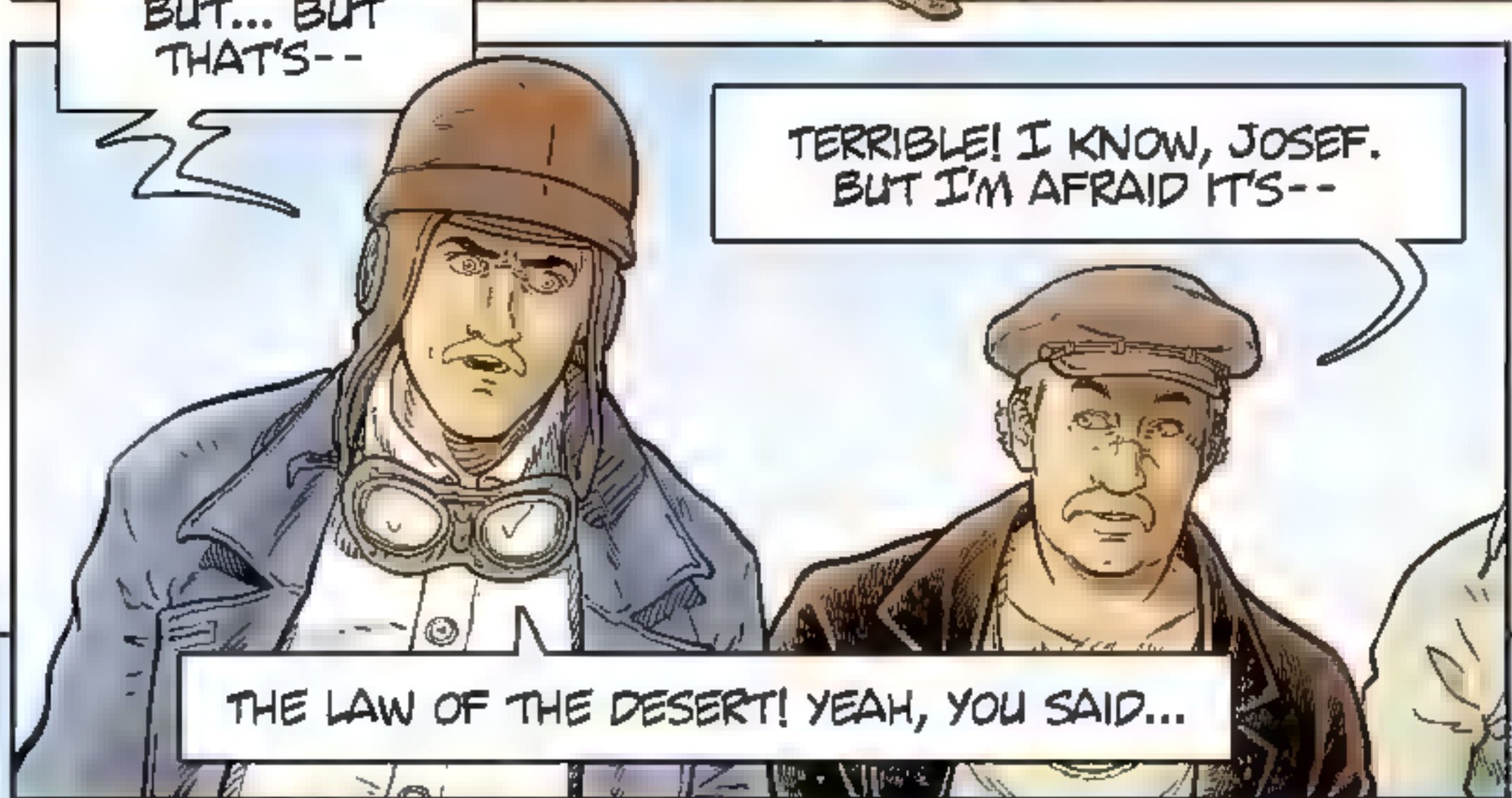
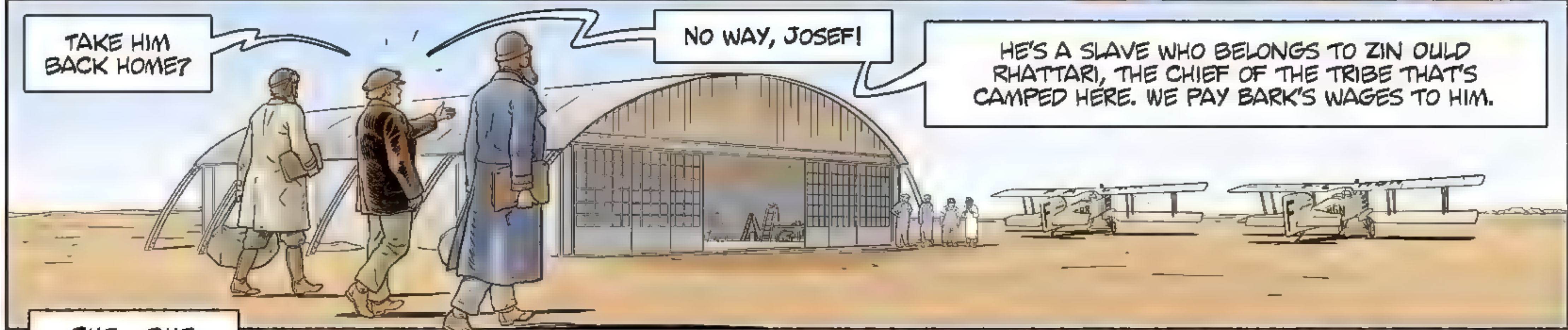
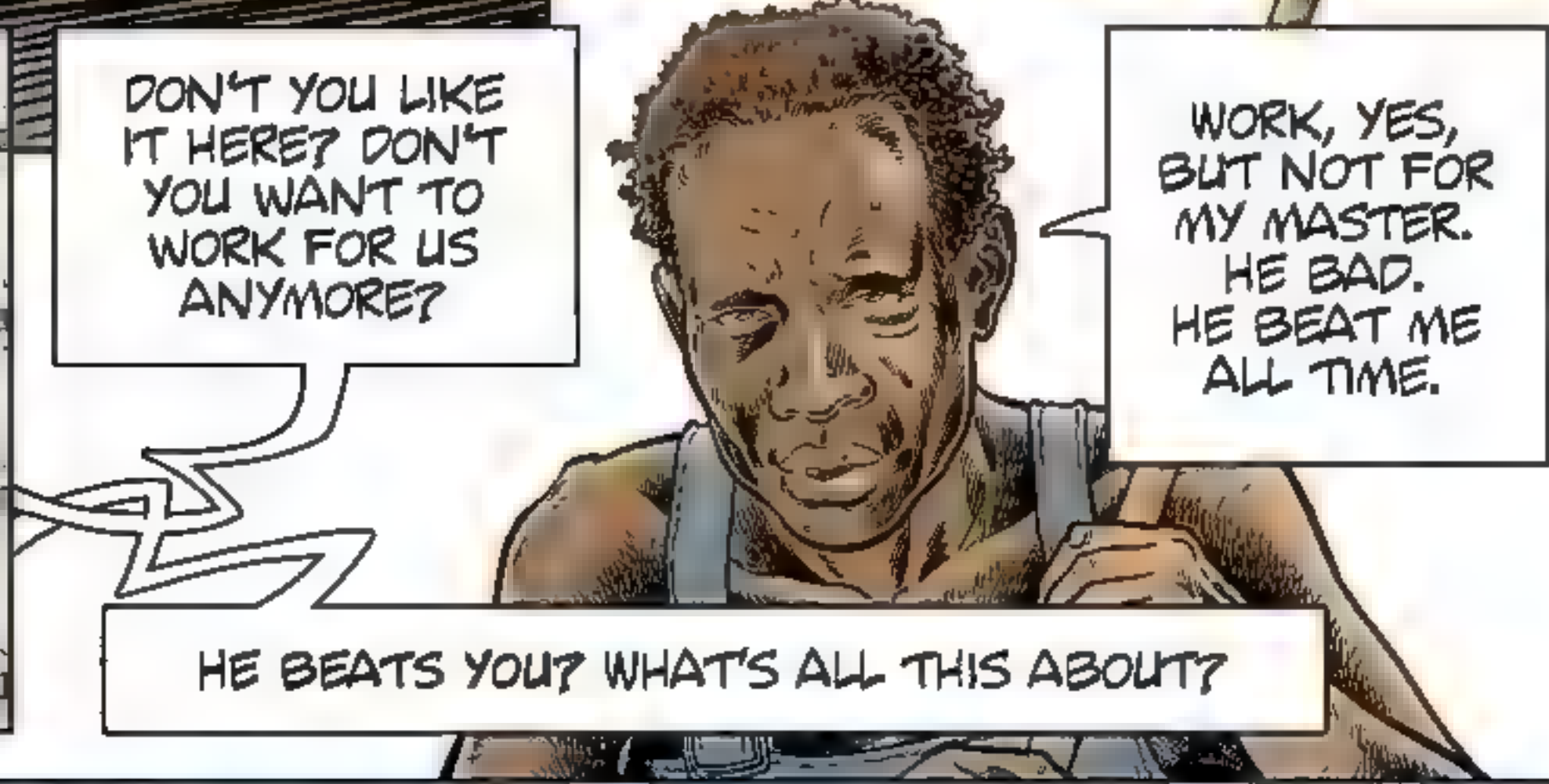
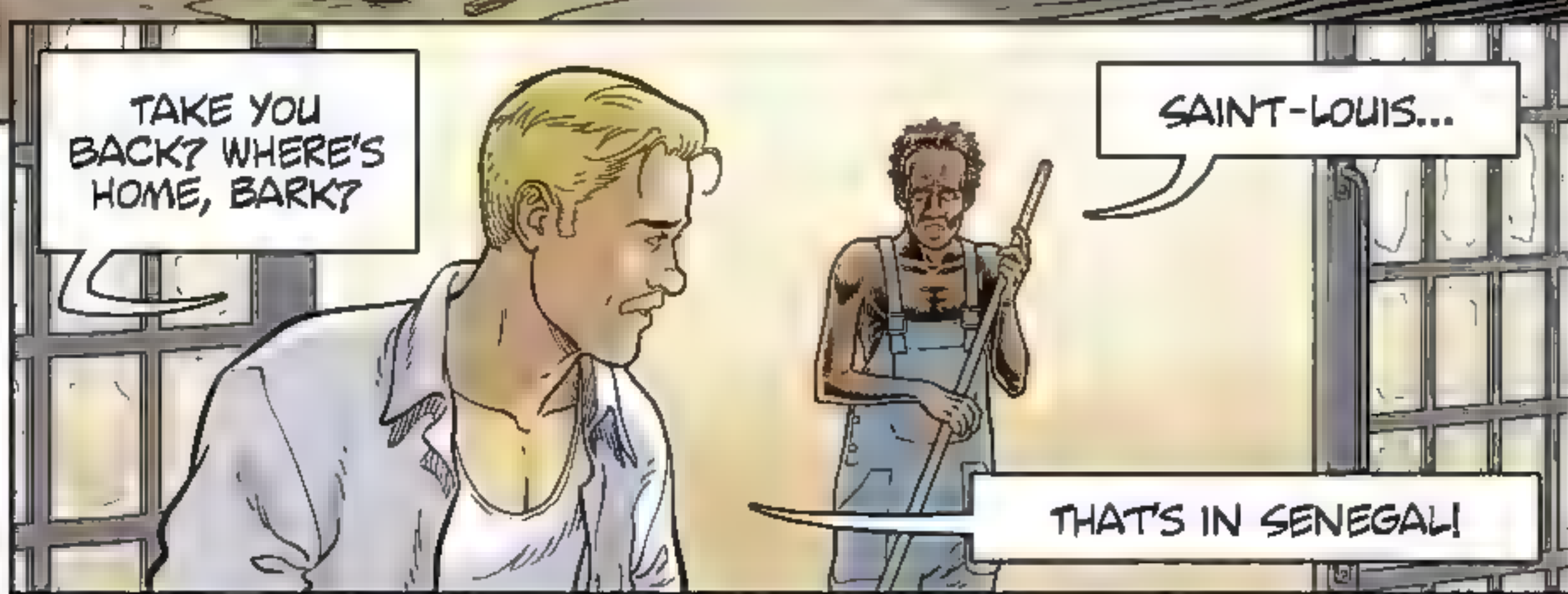
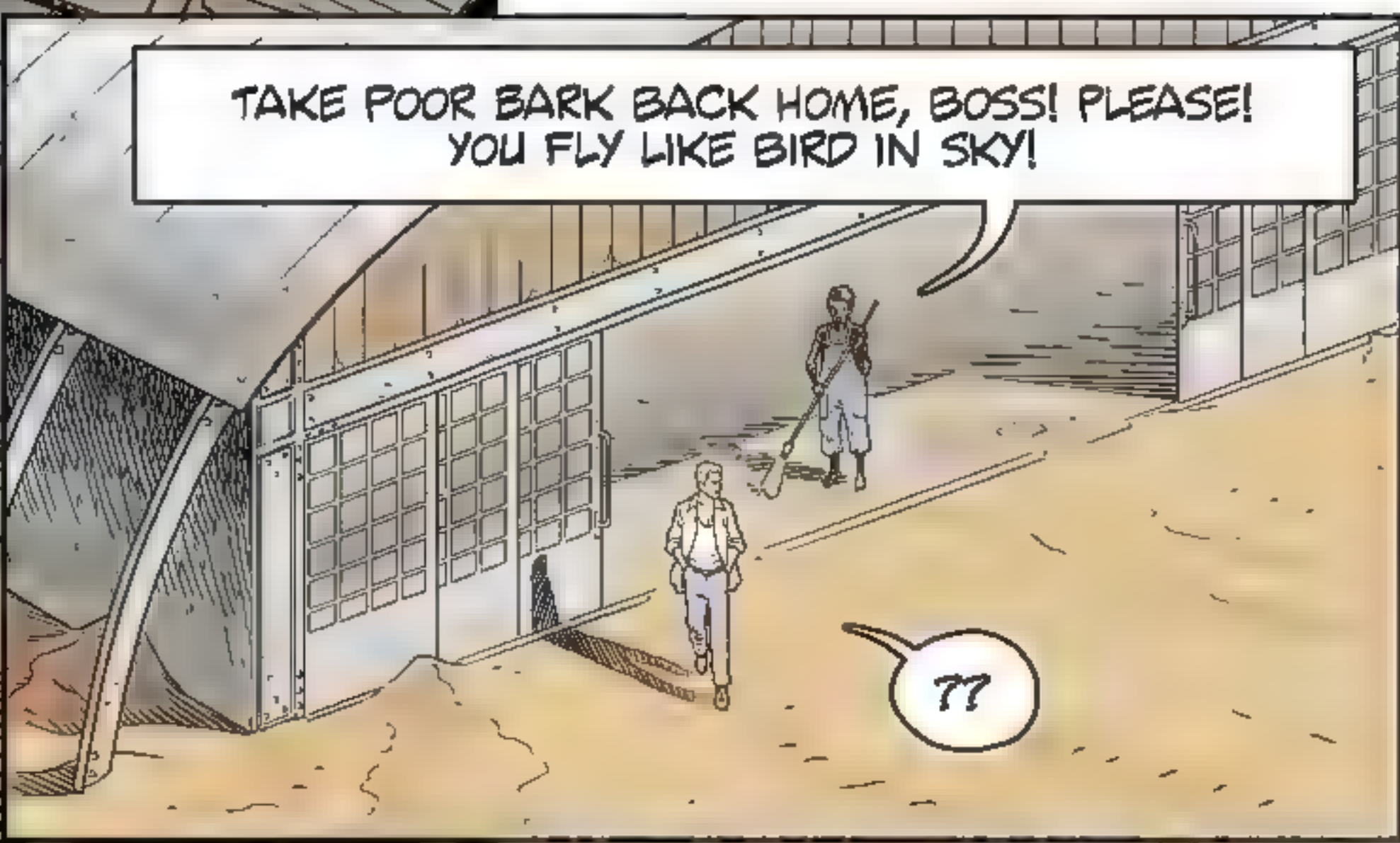
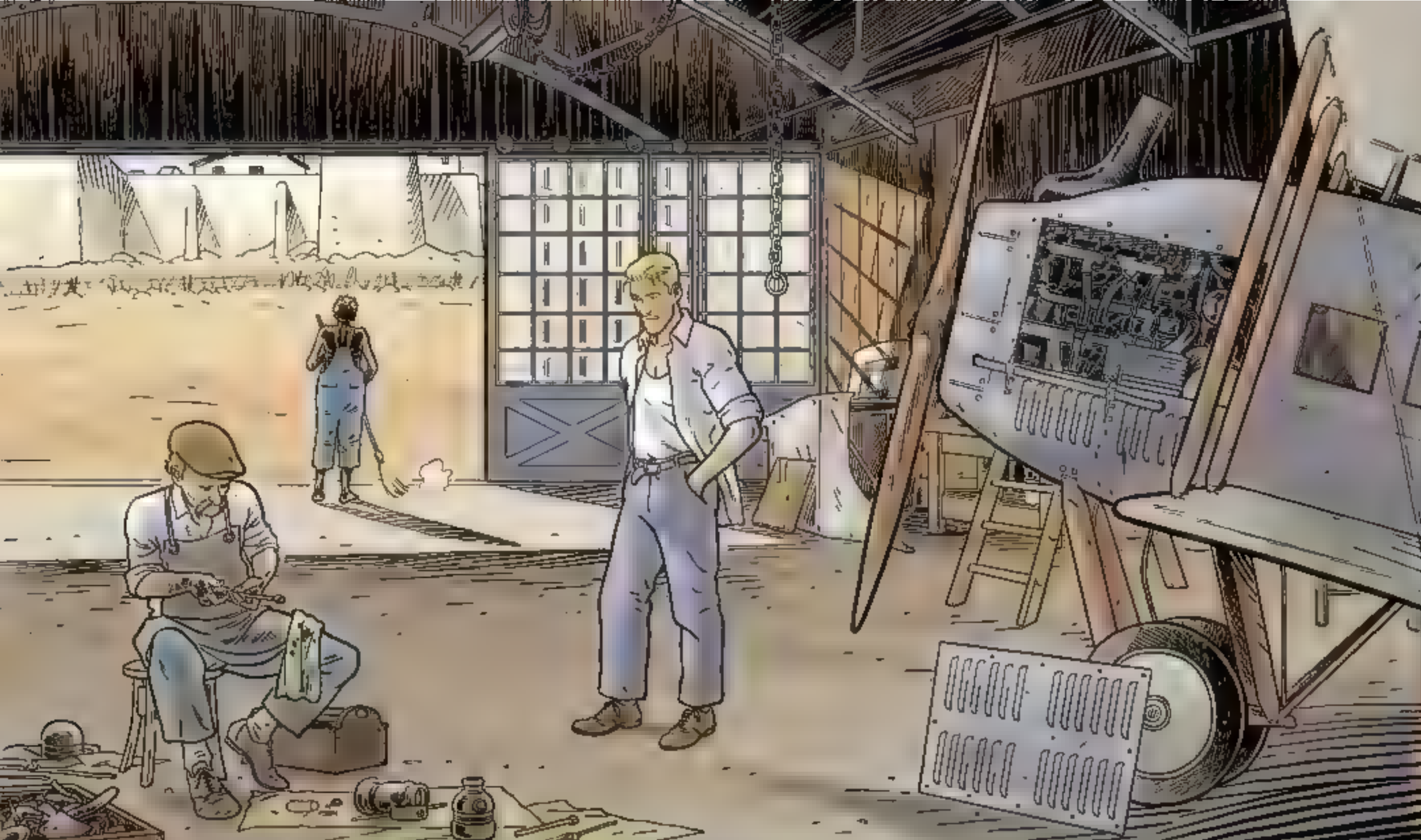
BUT THERE WAS NO ANSWER FROM VILLA CISNEROS. THEY WEREN'T ON DUTY YET.



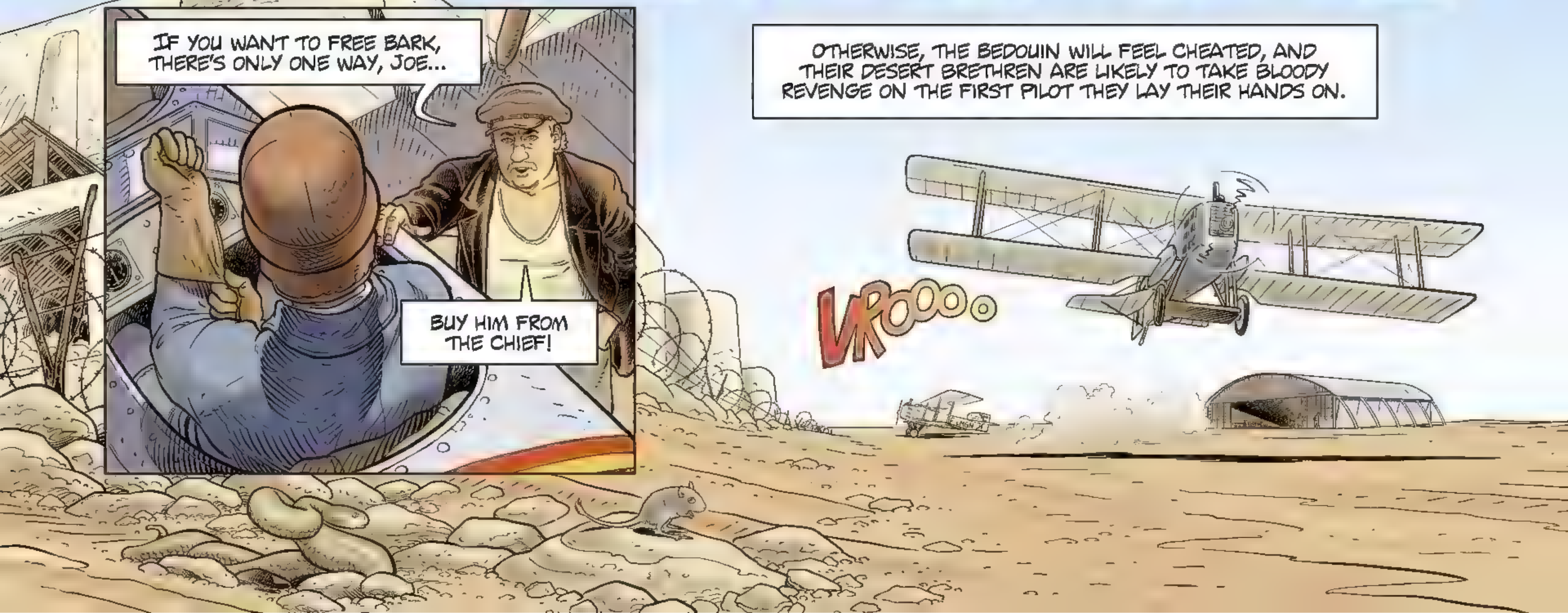
HE PROBABLY COULDN'T SEE A THING IN THIS CRAP!

OUR POINTLESS SPECULATIONS WERE NO HELP AT ALL.

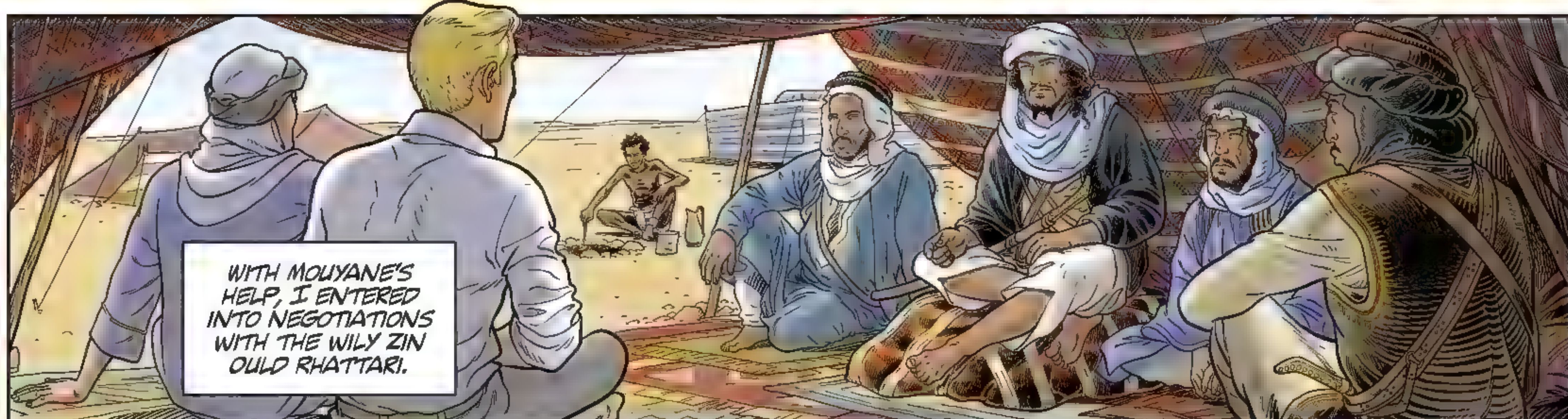




OTHERWISE, THE BEDOUIN WILL FEEL CHEATED, AND THEIR DESERT BRETHREN ARE LIKELY TO TAKE BLOODY REVENGE ON THE FIRST PILOT THEY LAY THEIR HANDS ON.

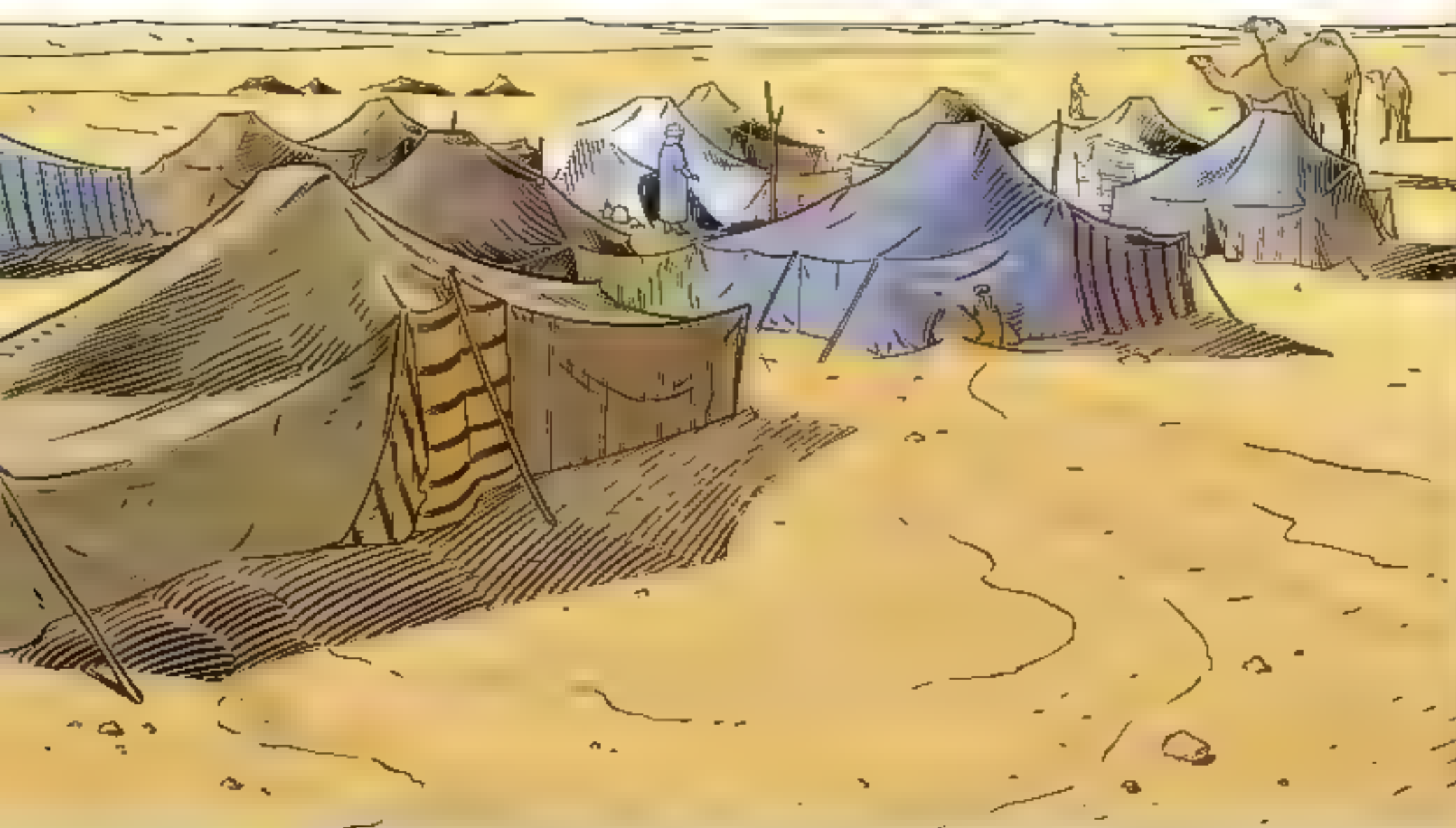


"RETTEEN WAS ZU RETTEEN IST," (1) AS THE GERMANS SAY. SO I SPENT MY DAYS AT CAPE JUBY TRYING TO BUY BARK FROM THE TRIBE.



(1) "SAVE WHAT CAN BE SAVED."

WE SPENT SEVERAL WEEKS BARTERING OVER GLASSES OF TEA THAT SEEMED TO CONTAIN MORE SUGAR THAN WATER. HOW COULD ANYONE DRINK THAT STUFF?

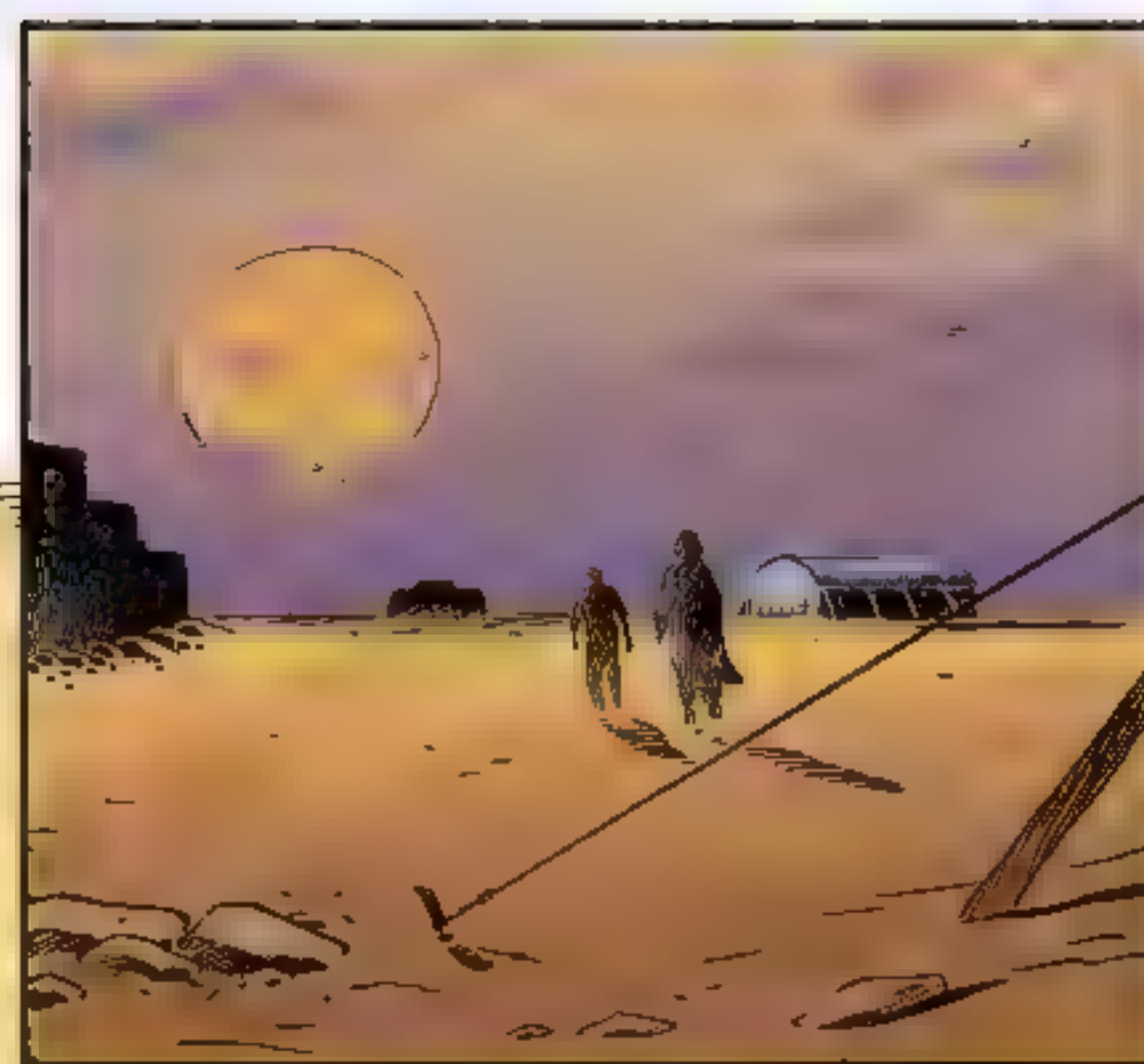


I FORCED IT DOWN, THOUGH, BECAUSE IT WAS AN INSULT TO REFUSE HOSPITALITY IN A BURYUT HAJAR. (1)



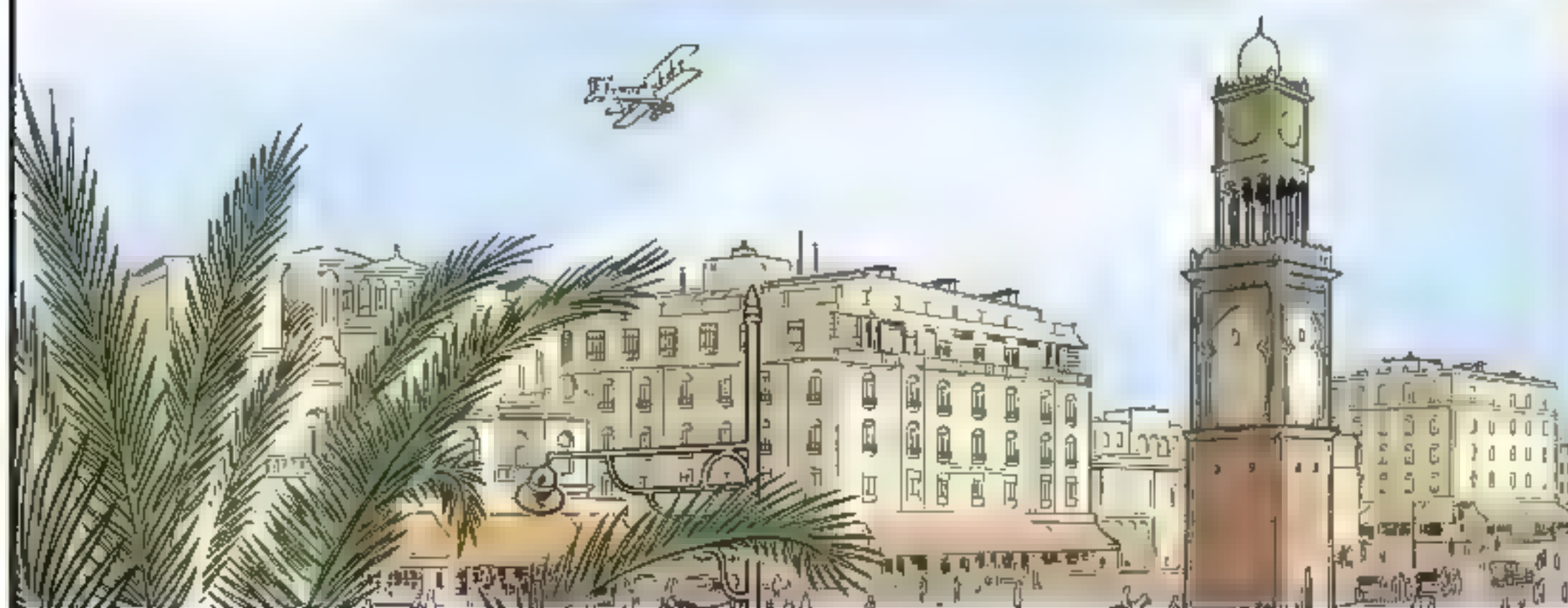
AND THAT ONE JUST SAID--

TELL HIM TO GO TO HELL!



IT OBVIOUSLY WASN'T COMMON FOR EUROPEANS TO WANT TO BUY SLAVES. AND FOR THIS BAND OF OUTLAWS, ANYTHING THEY GOT WOULD BE A GODSEND.

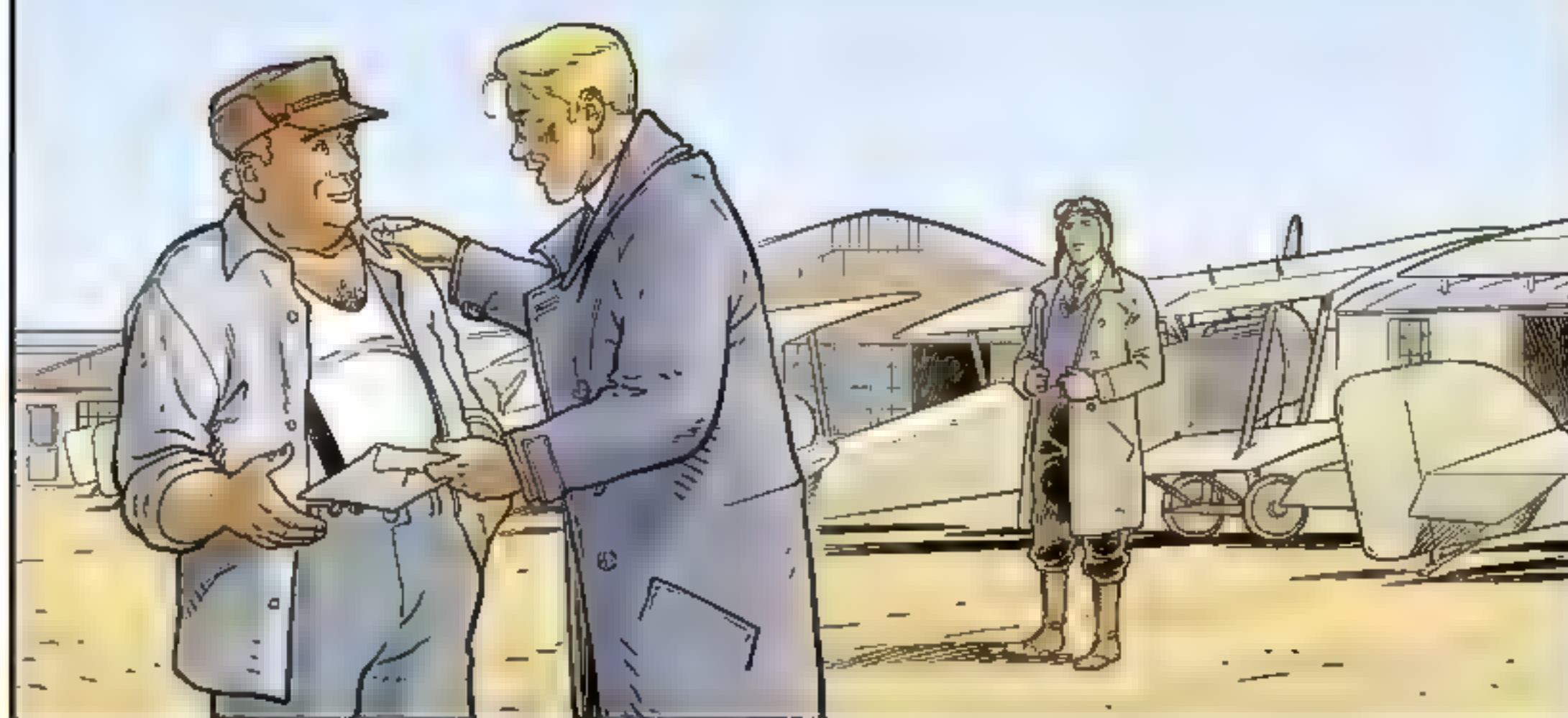
AFTER NUMEROUS MEETINGS AND GLASSES OF TEA, THE PRICE EVENTUALLY CAME DOWN, BUT IT WAS STILL TOO HIGH FOR MY PILOT'S WAGES AND THE LITTLE SAVINGS I HAD.



SO I ASKED MY FELLOW PILOTS ON THE CASABLANCA-DAKAR ROUTE TO CONTRIBUTE TO A "BARK FUND."

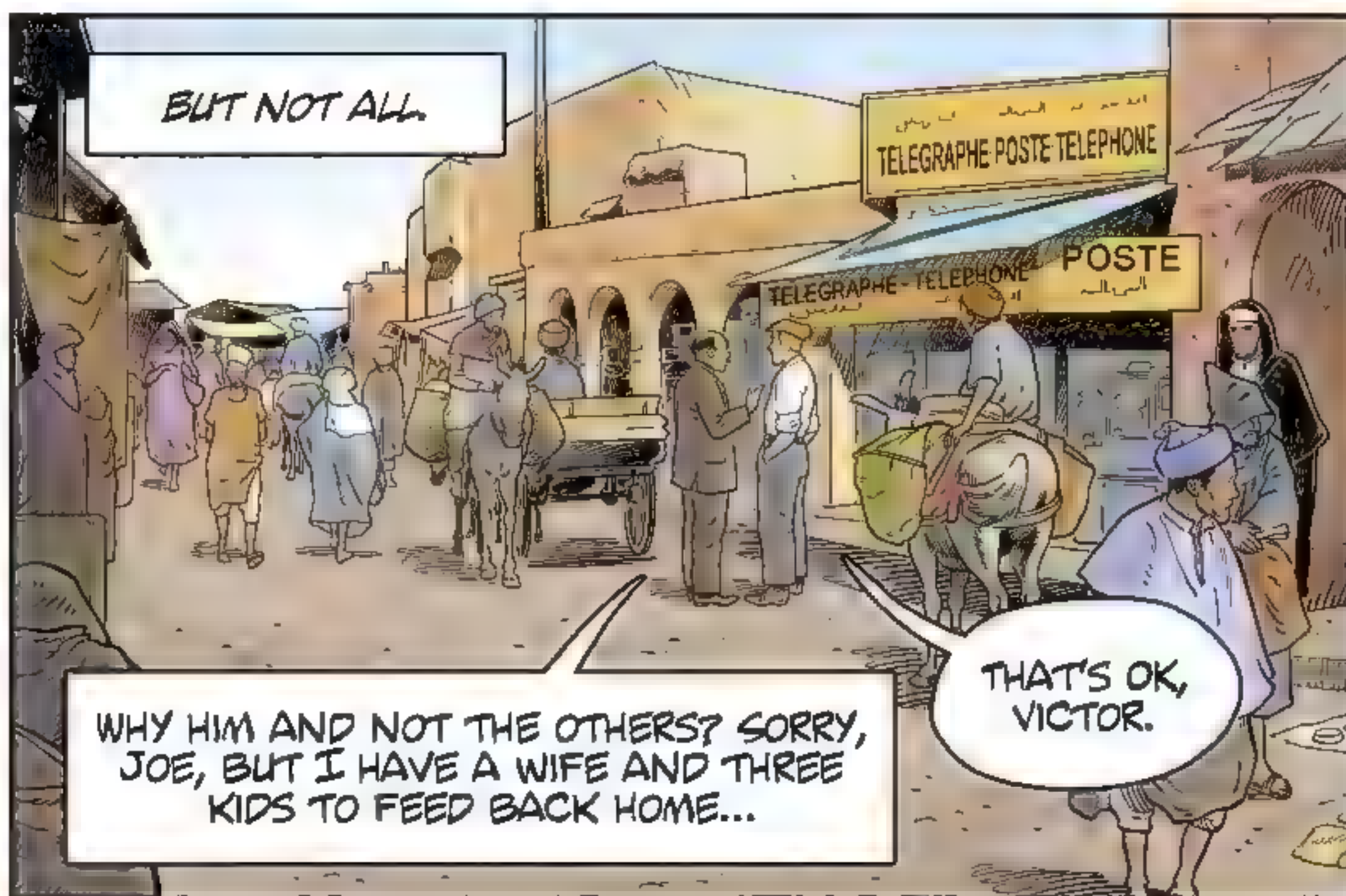


MANY WERE HAPPY TO PAY WHAT WAS IN EFFECT A RANSOM FOR HENRI BOUBA DIOLUF, WHICH WAS HIS REAL NAME, "BARK" BEING A GENERIC TERM FOR A SLAVE...



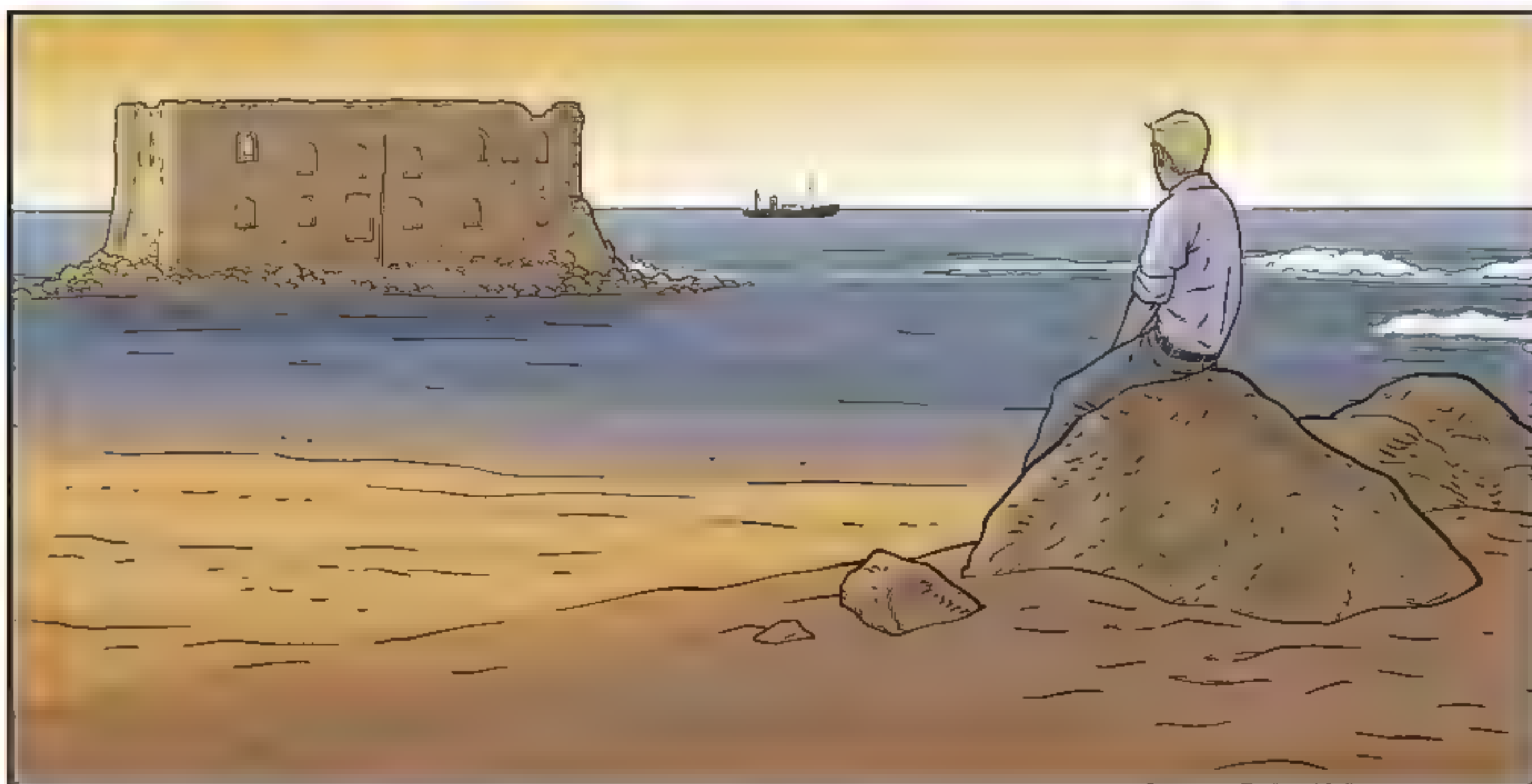
BUT NOT ALL.

WHY HIM AND NOT THE OTHERS? SORRY, JOE, BUT I HAVE A WIFE AND THREE KIDS TO FEED BACK HOME...



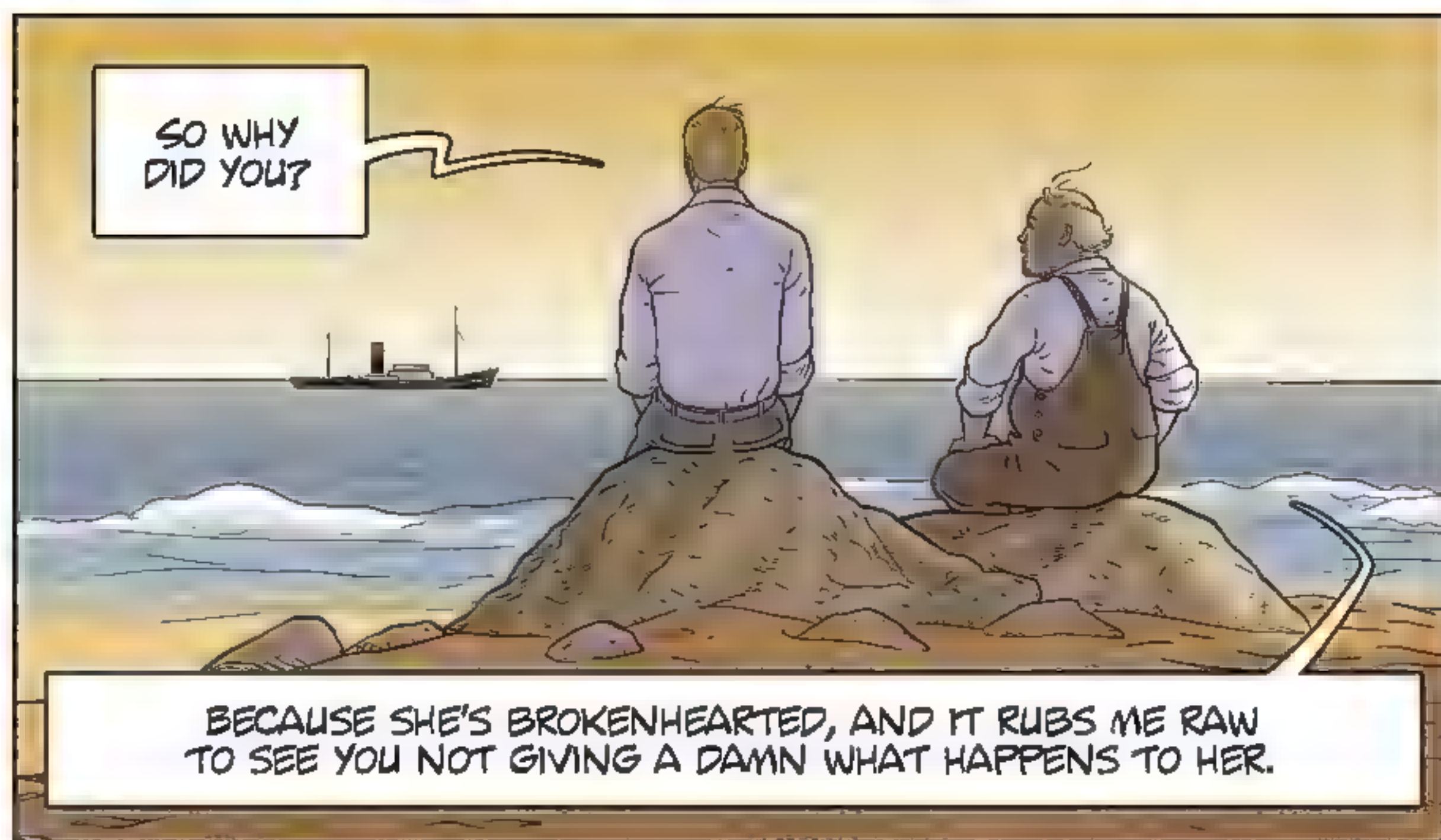
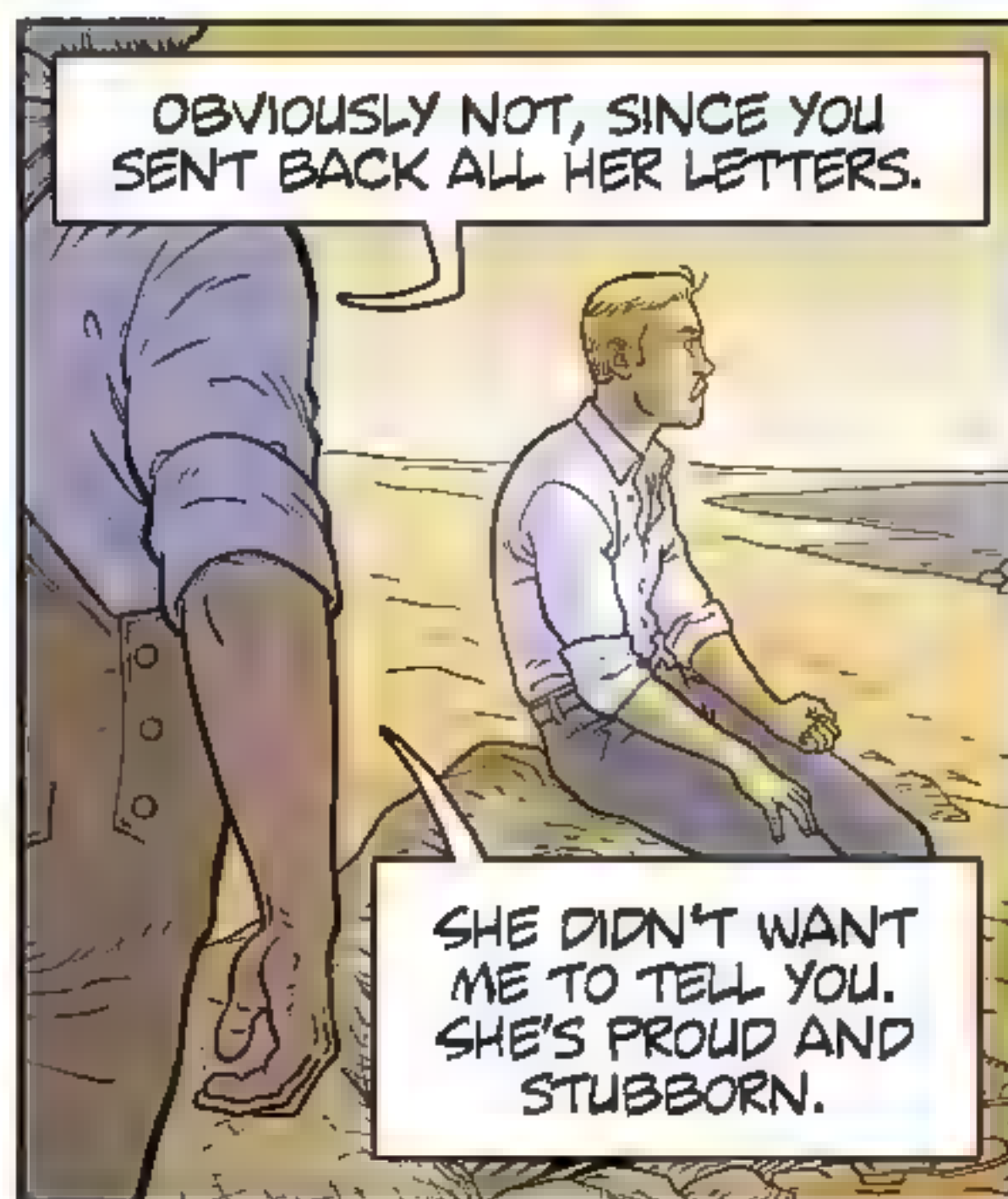
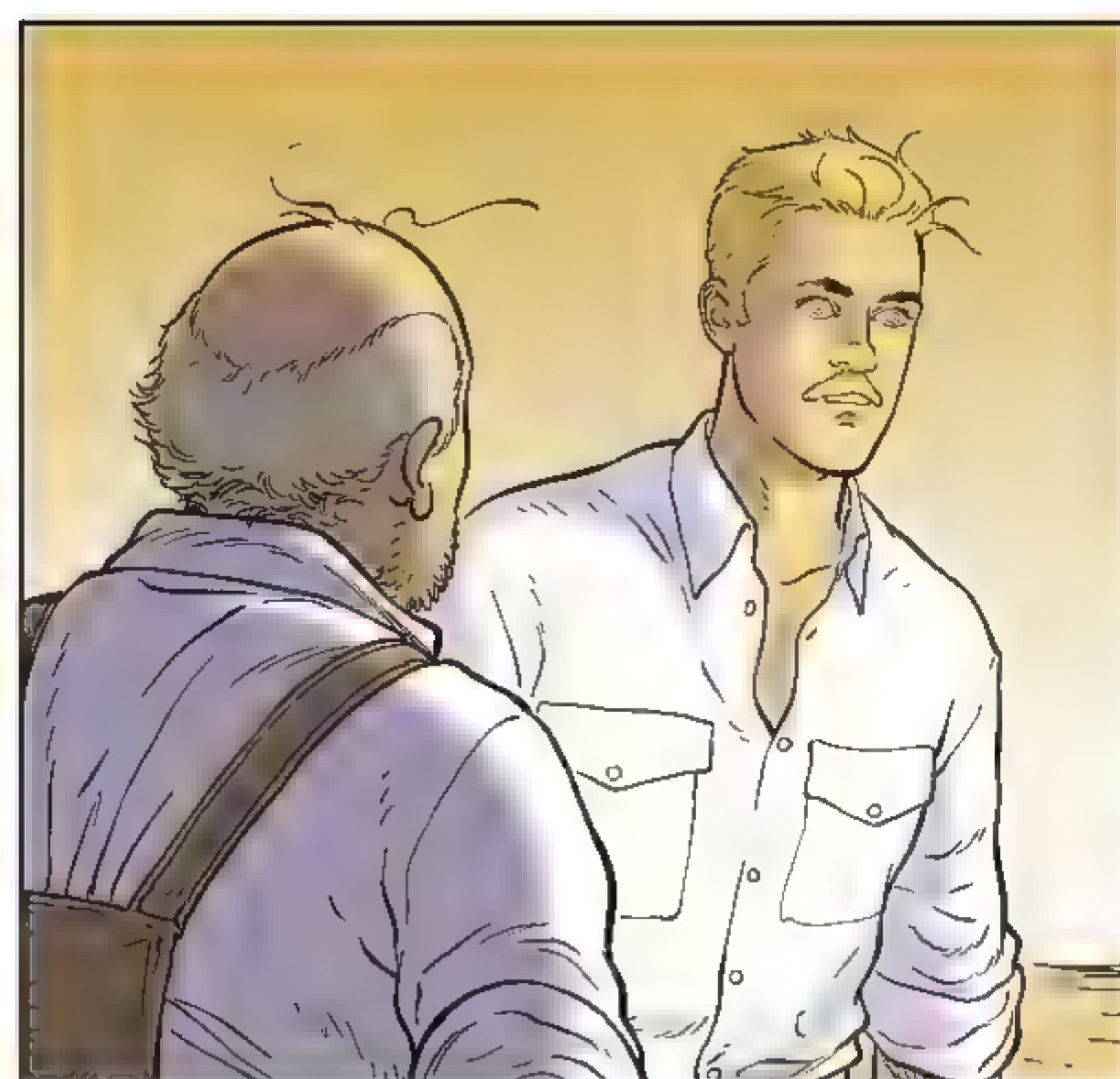
THAT'S OK, VICTOR.

SO YOU'D BEND OVER BACKWARD TO HELP A BLACK BEGGAR YOU KNOW NOTHING ABOUT, BUT YOU WON'T GIVE A PENNY TO THE WOMAN WHO GAVE YOU HER HEART AND HER BODY?

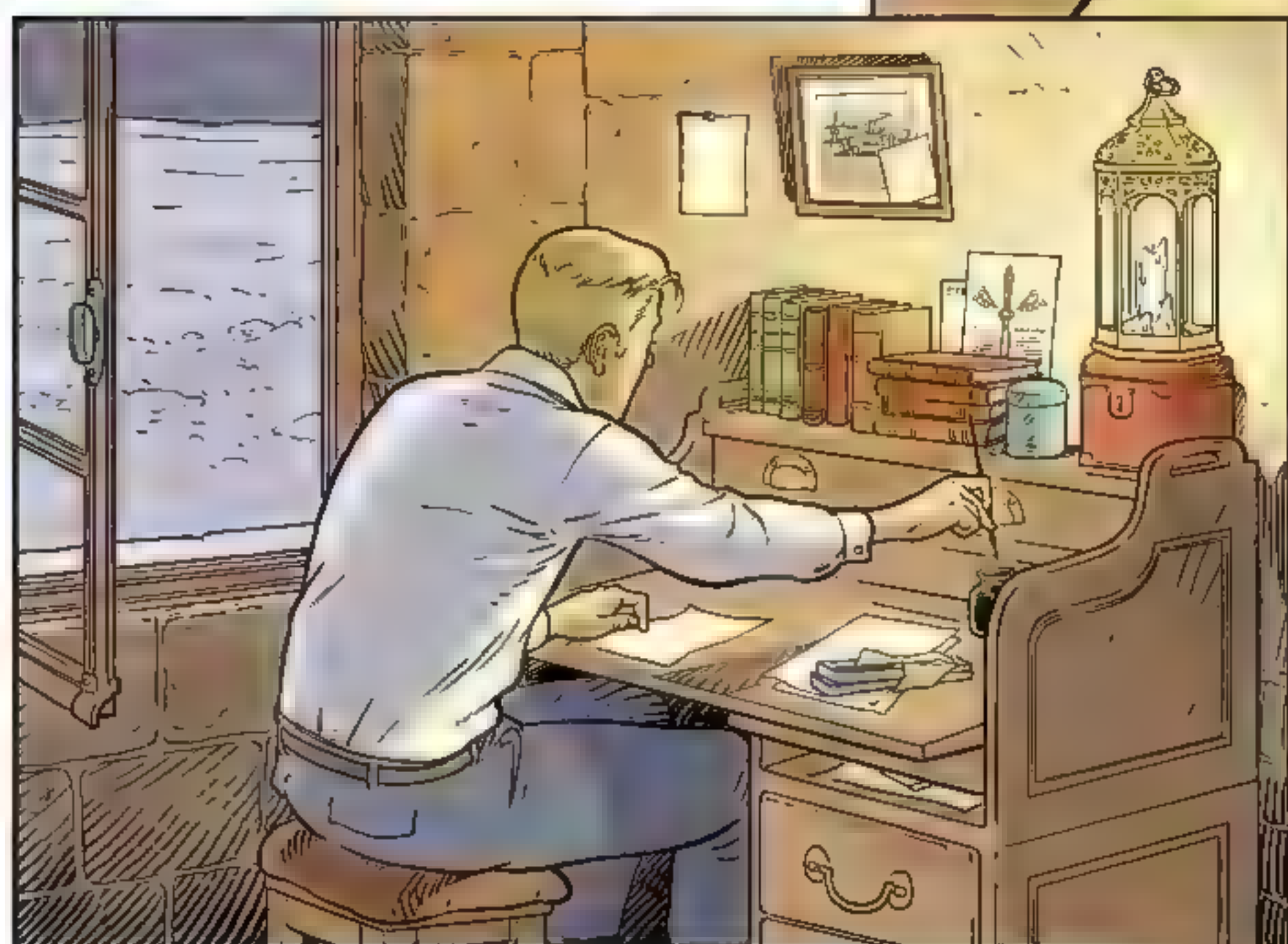
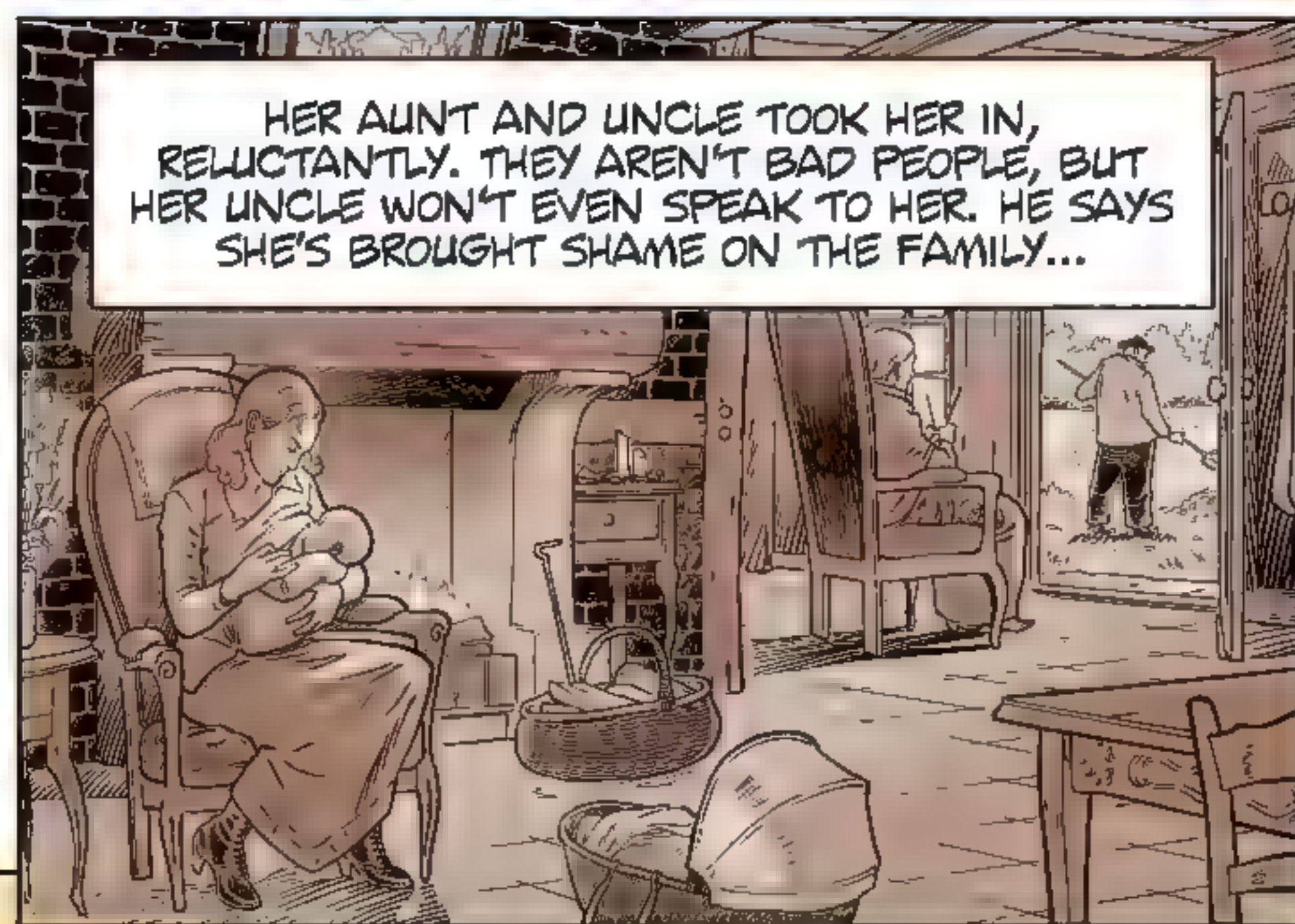
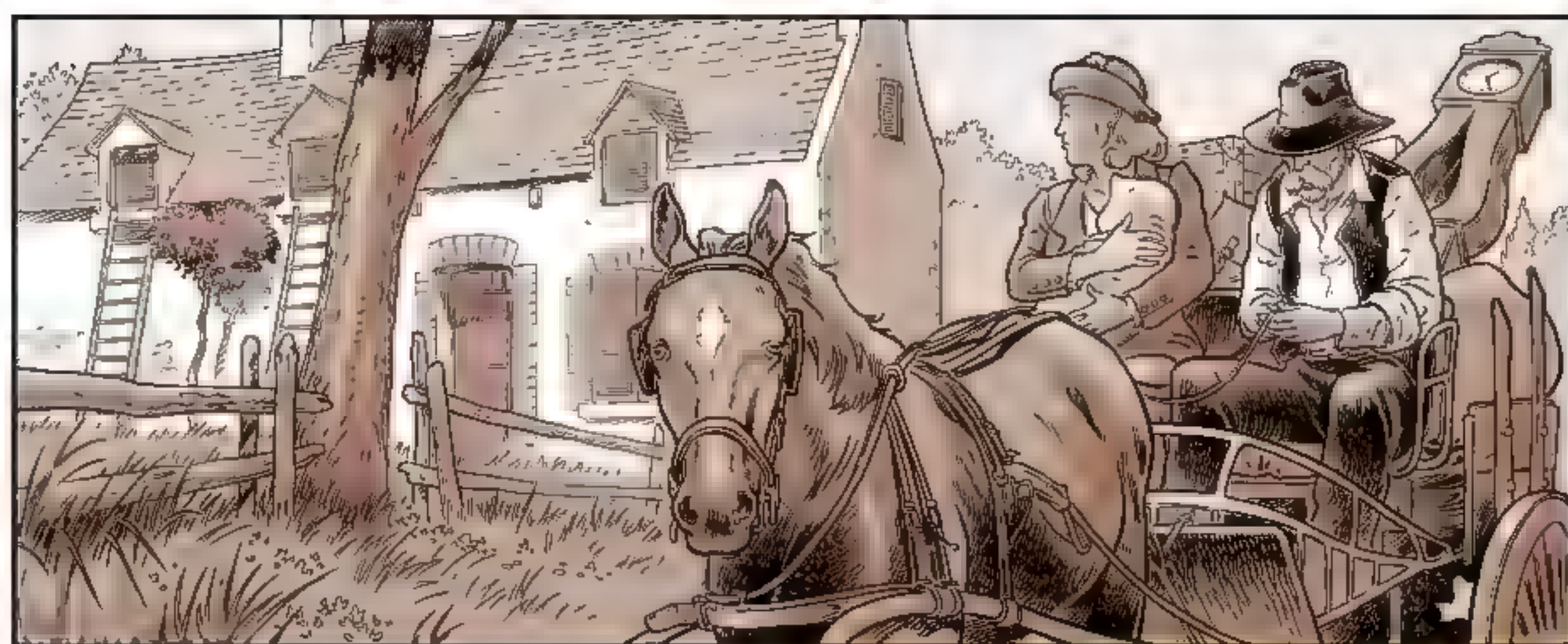


?!

(1) A BEDOUIN TENT (LITERALLY "HOUSE OF HAIR").



AFTER YOU KNOCKED HER UP AND ABANDONED HER, THE VILLAGE
FOLK STARTED CALLING HER A HARLOT... IT GOT SO BAD THAT SHE HAD
TO SELL UP FOR NEXT TO NOTHING AND LEAVE.

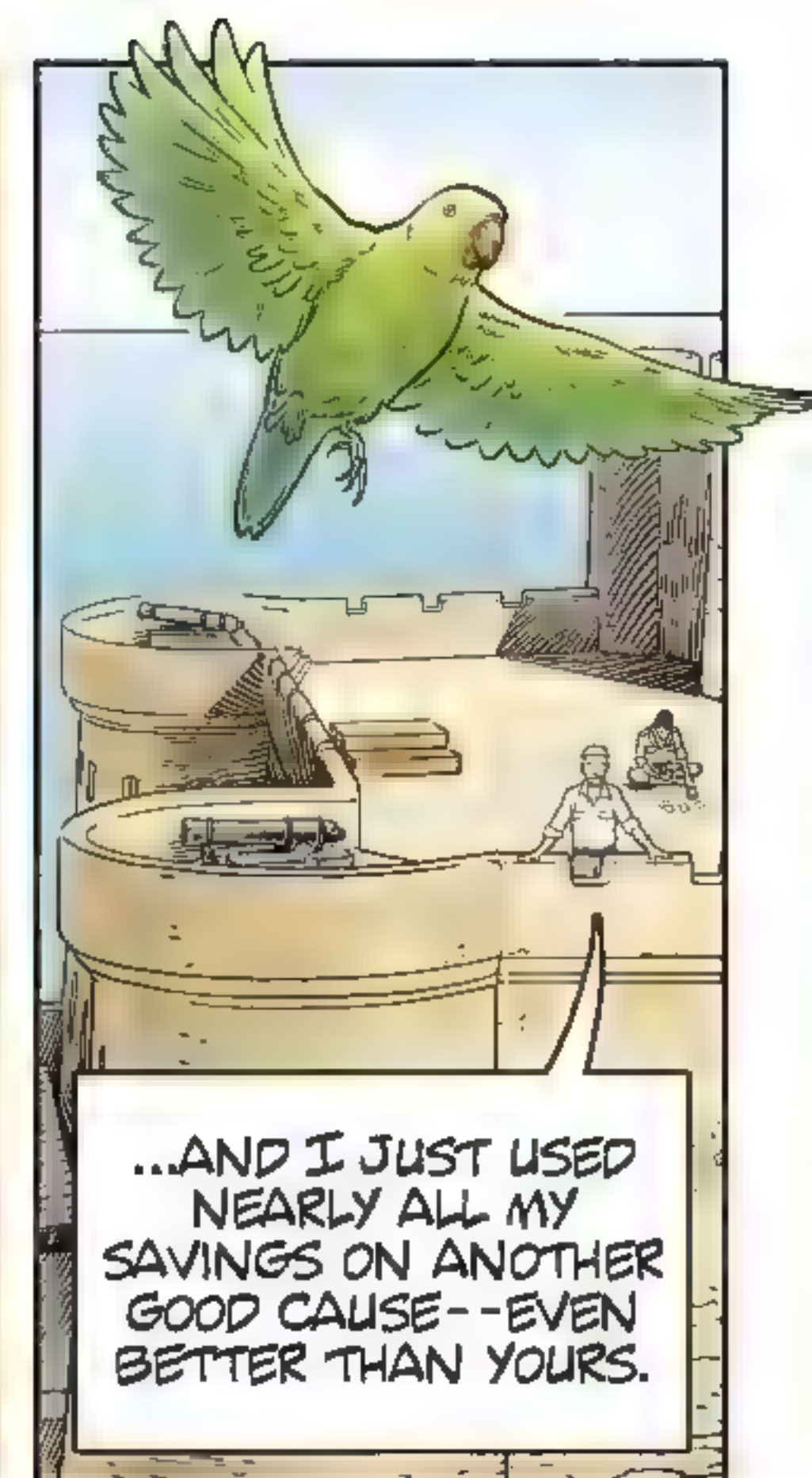
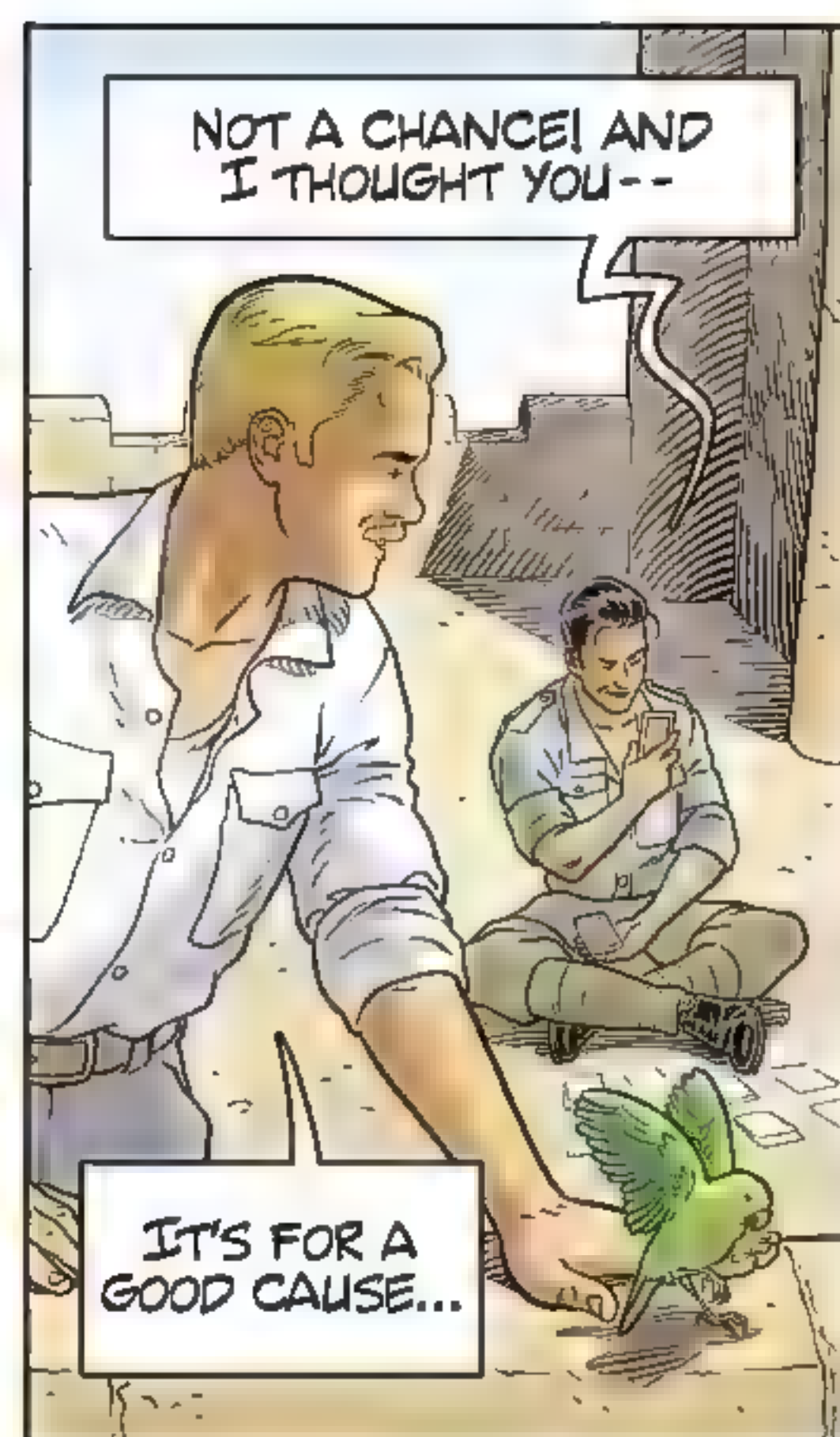
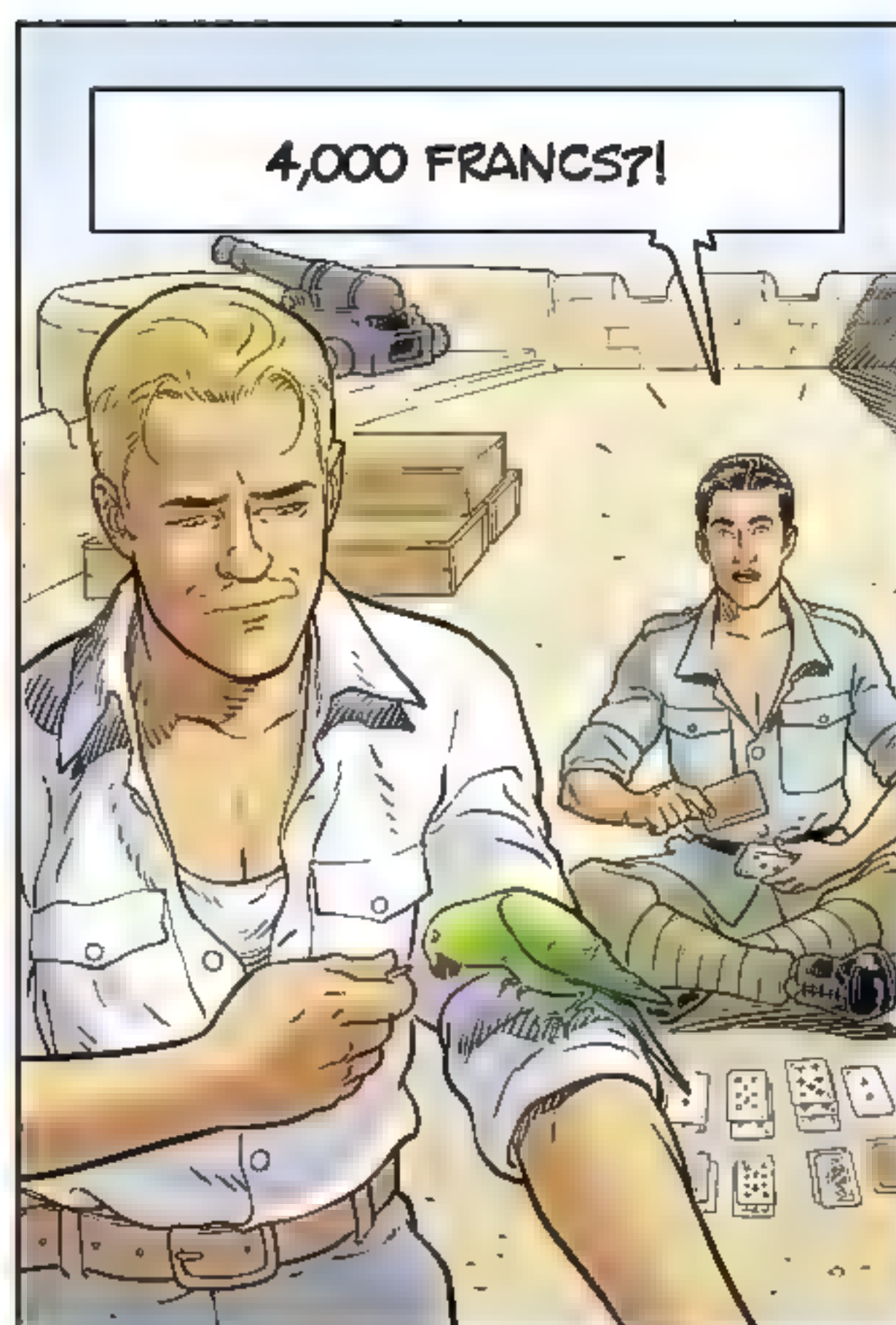


Life here isn't easy, but I'm doing what
I was destined to do.

Fly!

I always told you it was what I wanted
I don't know if I'm still in love with you, Adèle, but my sense of duty
obliges me to ask you to marry me... If that's what you want, of course.
It would be wrong for our son to grow up without a father.
Since I'm earning a decent salary now (even though other airlines
pay their pilots better), I'll start sending you money to pay
for the things you need.

I forgot to ask: what did you call our son? Please
write to me at the address below



ENRIQUE PAID UP, AND I FINALLY AGREED ON A PRICE FOR BARK. HE WAS HANDED OVER TO ME, AND I IMMEDIATELY SIGNED AN OFFICIAL DOCUMENT GIVING HIM HIS FREEDOM. THERE WAS A BIG CEREMONY WITH THAT CROOK ZIN OULD RHATTARI.



LEGALLY, HE WAS ALSO MY SON. AND THAT WAS HOW I SUDDENLY FOUND MYSELF WITH TWO KIDS!

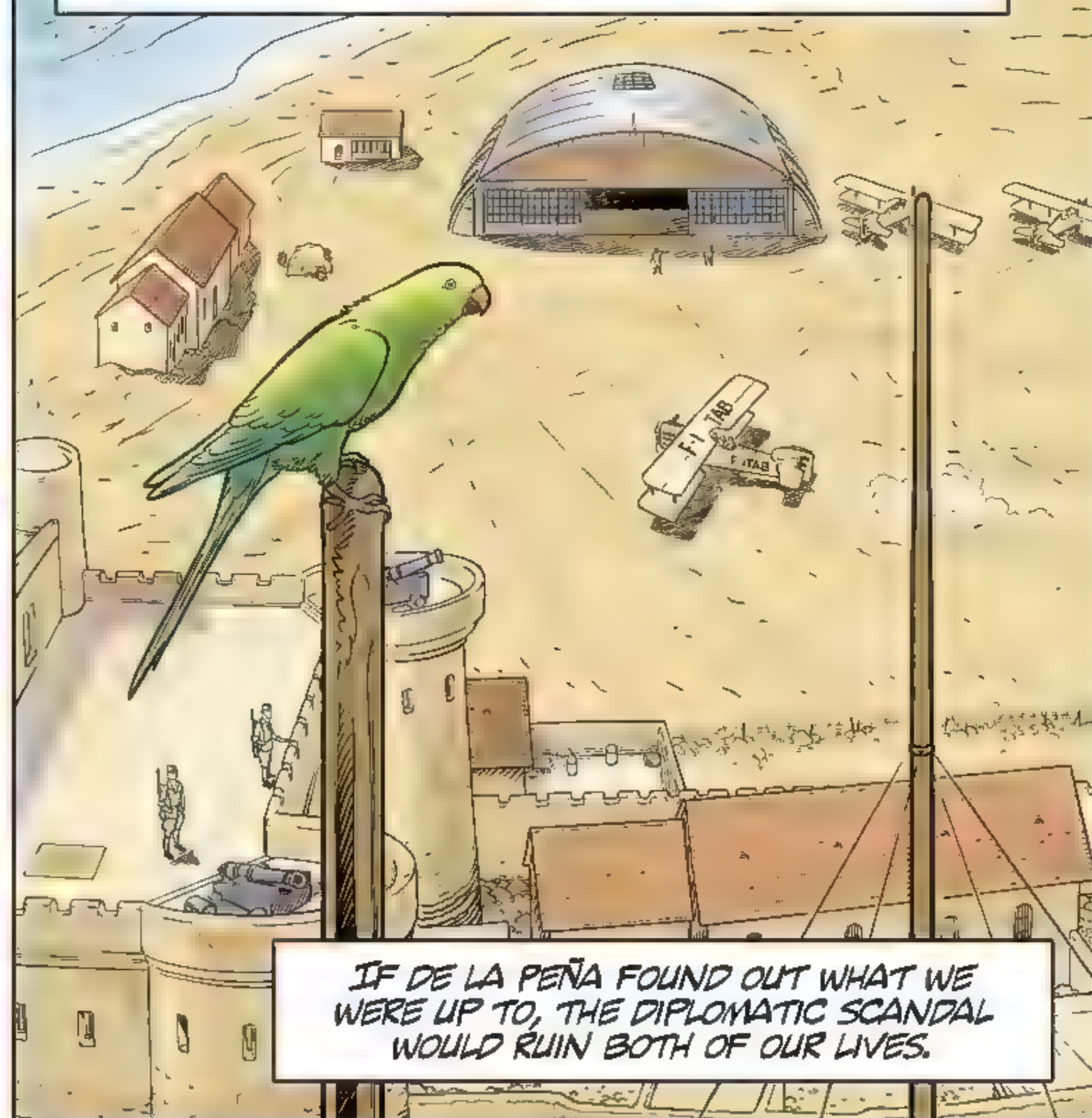
DON'T SET FOOT OUTSIDE THE BUILDINGS, HENRI. YOU HEAR?



THOSE LOUSY DESERT RATS MIGHT CUT YOUR HEAD OFF JUST FOR THE PLEASURE OF GETTING ONE OVER ON ME.



I HID BOTH ENRIQUE AND HENRI BOUBA DIOUF IN ONE OF THE HANGARS. ENRIQUE HAD GONE AWOL, LEAVING CLUES BEHIND TO MAKE IT LOOK LIKE HE'D JOINED SOME BEDOUIN TRIBE.



VIDAL WAS DEAD SET AGAINST IT, BUT I'D MANAGED TO PERSUADE HIM TO LET ME FLY TO DAKAR IN THE LIMO (1) SO I COULD TAKE ENRIQUE WITH ME.

I HAD TO GET RID OF OUR SECRET SPANISH DESERTER AS QUICKLY AS I COULD... AND GET HENRI BOUBA DIOUF AS FAR AWAY FROM HIS FORMER OWNER AS POSSIBLE.

OSCAR, HAVE YOU SEEN BARK THIS MORNING?

UH, NO... I WAS JUST WONDERING WH--

BOSS!

??

?!

THEY TOOK BARK LAST NIGHT AND SOLD HIM!

THE FILTHY BASTARDS!!

WHO? WHO TOOK HIM??

BARK'S A STUPID NEGRO! HE WANTED TO SAY GOODBYE TO A FRIEND.

WHO TOOK HIM?

RAGGI!

?

NO YOU DON'T, YOU RAT!!

?!

I'M GONNA CATCH YOU ANYWAY!

HUN! HUN!

NOT IDEAL FOR RUNNING, THAT BURNOOSE, IS IT?

HUN! H....

RHAA!!

?

(1) A BREGUET XIV MODIFIED FOR PASSENGER TRANSPORT.



WHERE'S BARK, YOU SCUM?

TALK, OR I'LL BREAK YOUR SKULL!



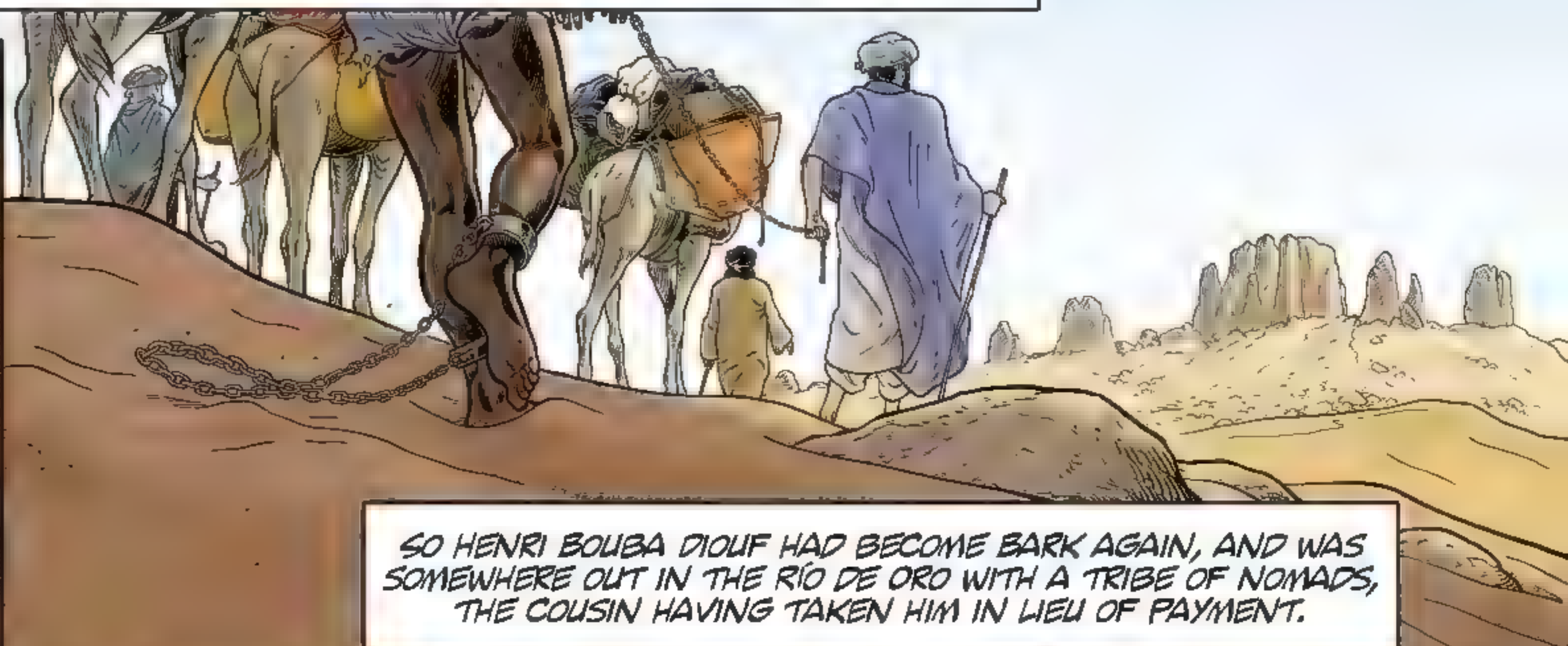
WHERE IS HE?

WHERE, FOR GOD'S SAKE?!



JOE! HE DOESN'T UNDERSTAND.

WITH MOUYANE'S HELP, WE DISCOVERED THAT RAGGI OWED MONEY TO A NOMAD COUSIN WHO'D RECENTLY TURNED UP AT CAPE JUBY. NOT HAVING ENOUGH TO REPAY HIM, RAGGI HAD SPOTTED HENRI RISKING A RETURN TO THE CAMP TO SAY GOODBYE TO HIS FRIEND BOUBACAR, AND SEIZED HIS CHANCE.



SO HENRI BOUBA DIOUF HAD BECOME BARK AGAIN, AND WAS SOMEWHERE OUT IN THE RIO DE ORO WITH A TRIBE OF NOMADS, THE COUSIN HAVING TAKEN HIM IN LIEU OF PAYMENT.



WE'D BEEN HAD. WORSE, WE'D BEEN DISHONORED.

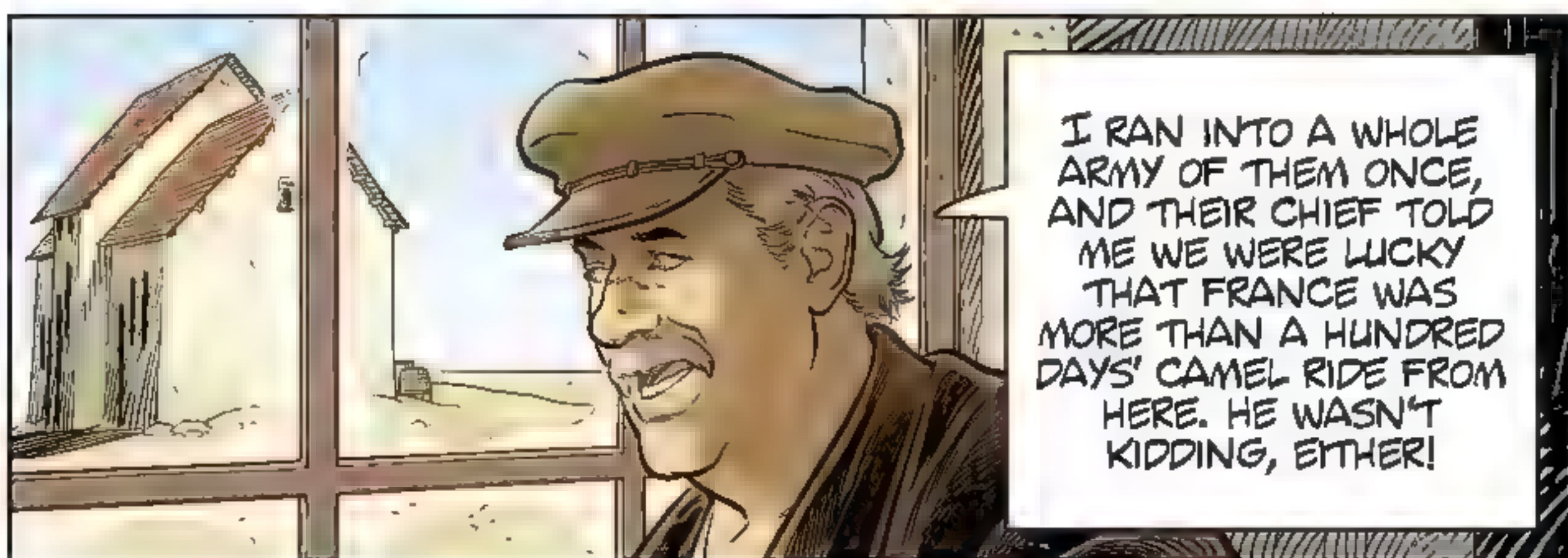
YOU CAN'T WIN WITH THOSE MORONS. THEY'LL HATE US FOREVER NOW.

BASTARD ARABS!

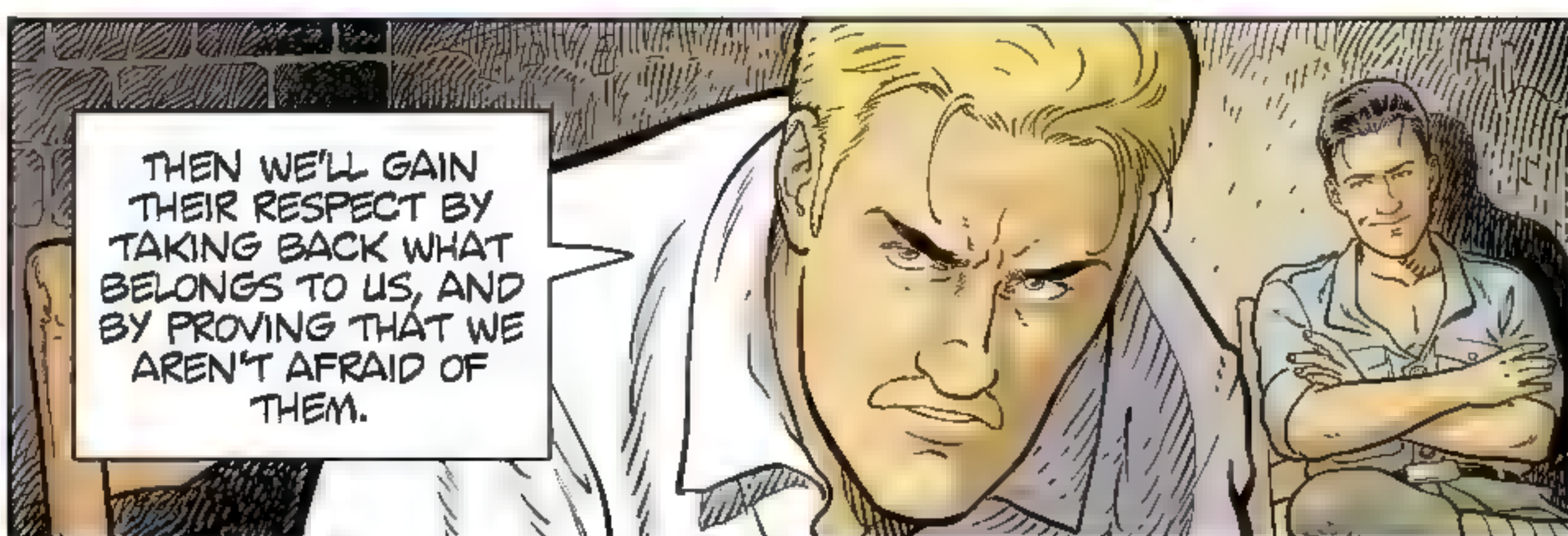
WE'RE IN THEIR COUNTRY, FELLAS. DON'T FORGET THAT!



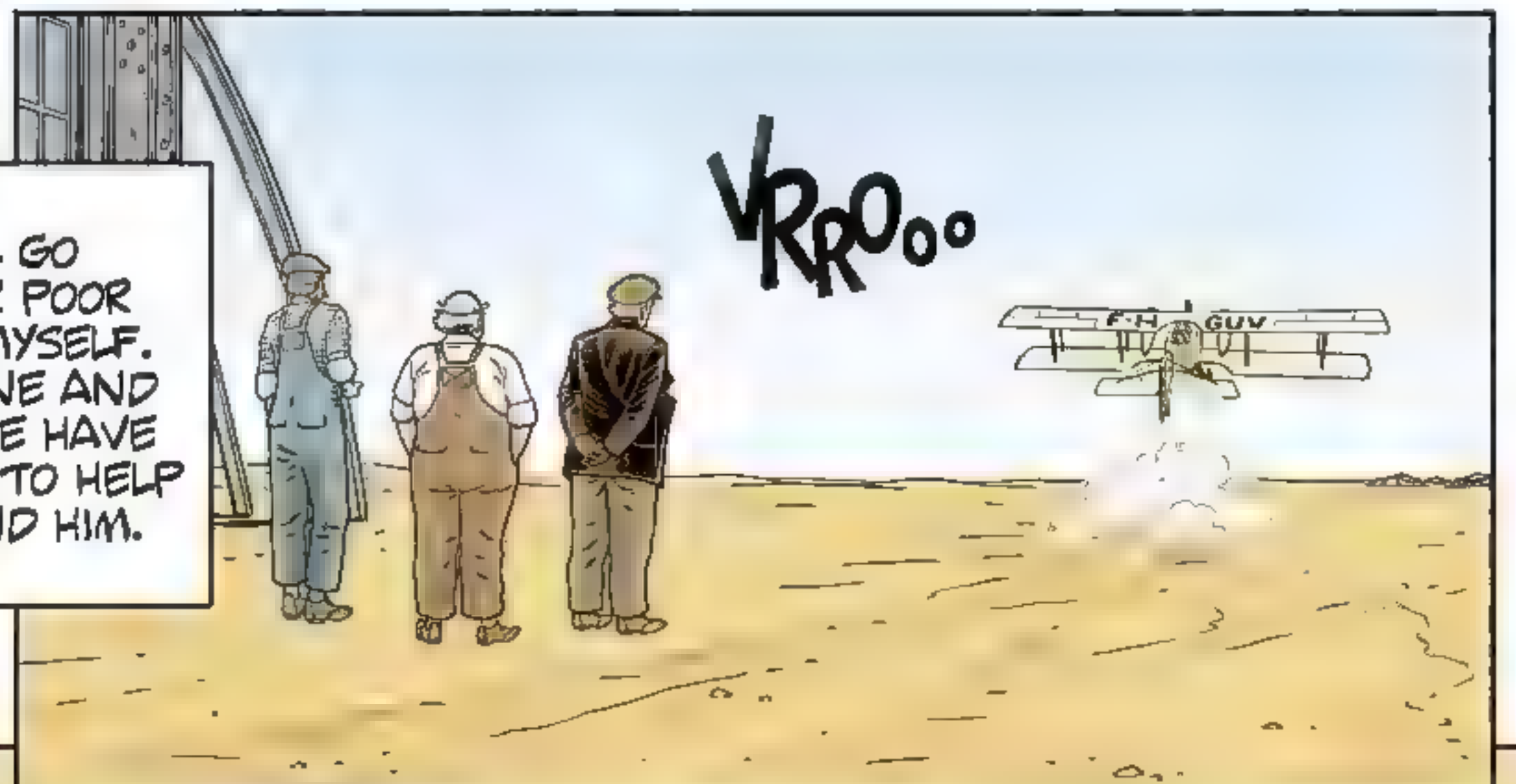
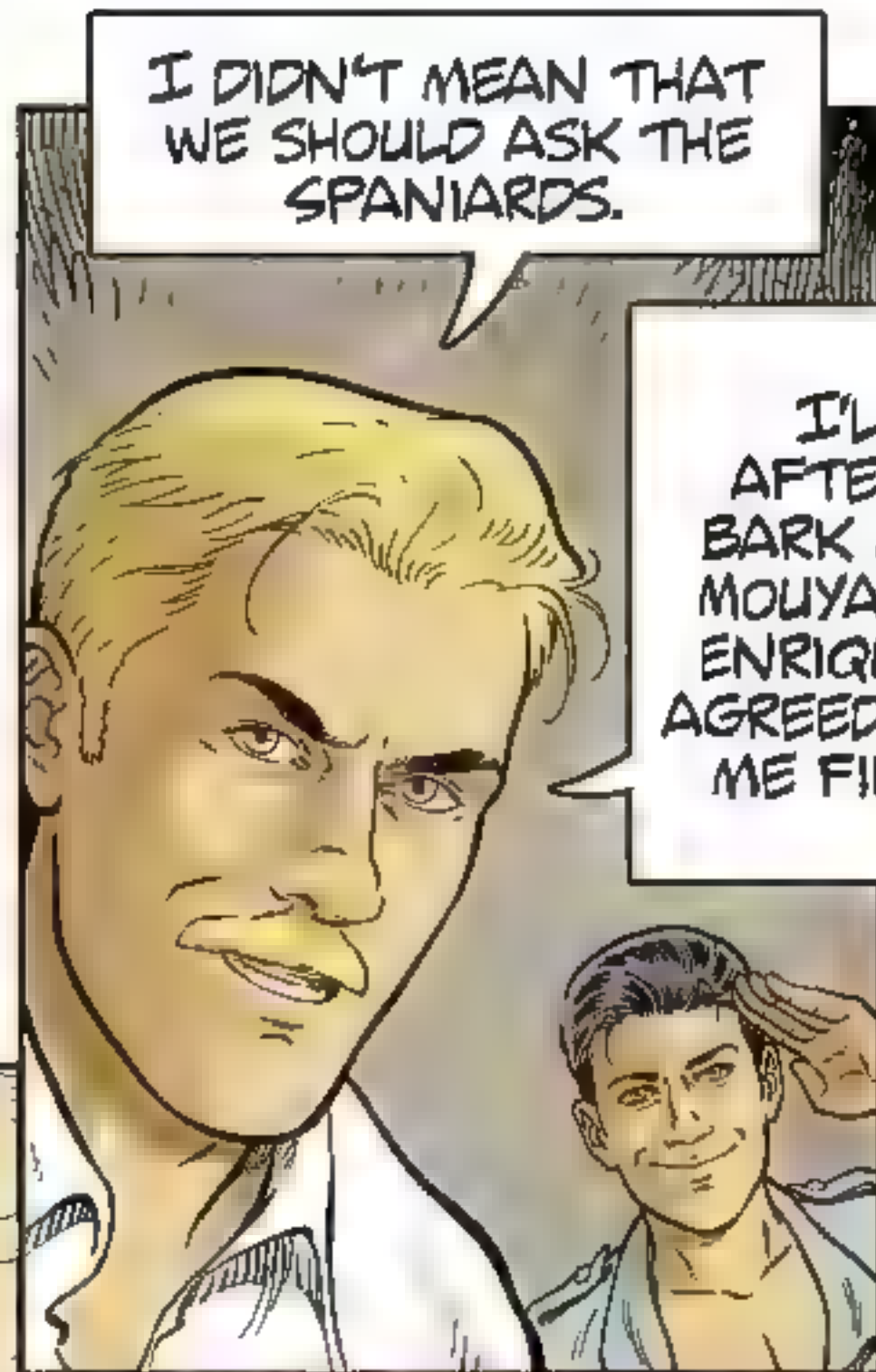
THEY DON'T HATE US, THEY JUST LOOK DOWN ON US. THEY'RE PROUD PEOPLE WHO THINK THEY CAN DO WHAT THEY WANT. THAT'S ALSO THEIR WEAKNESS.



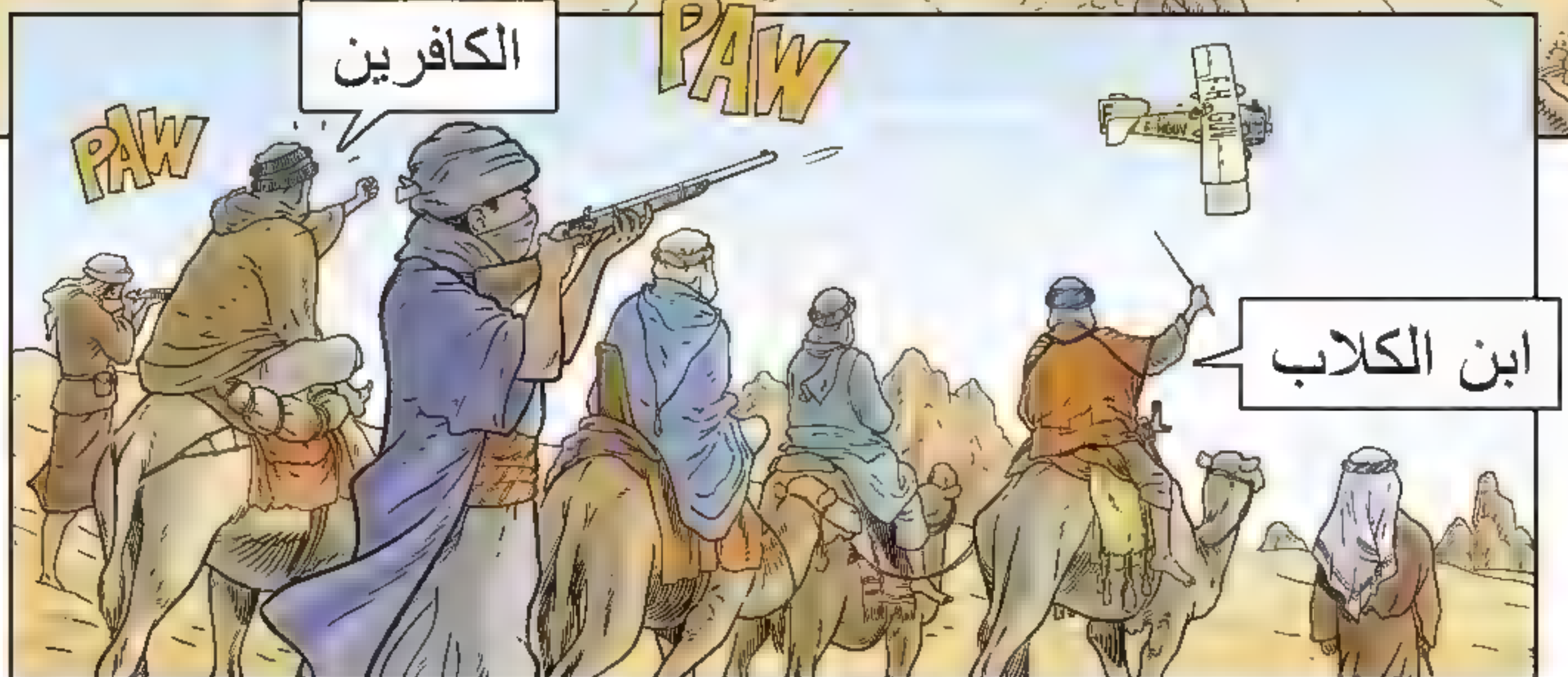
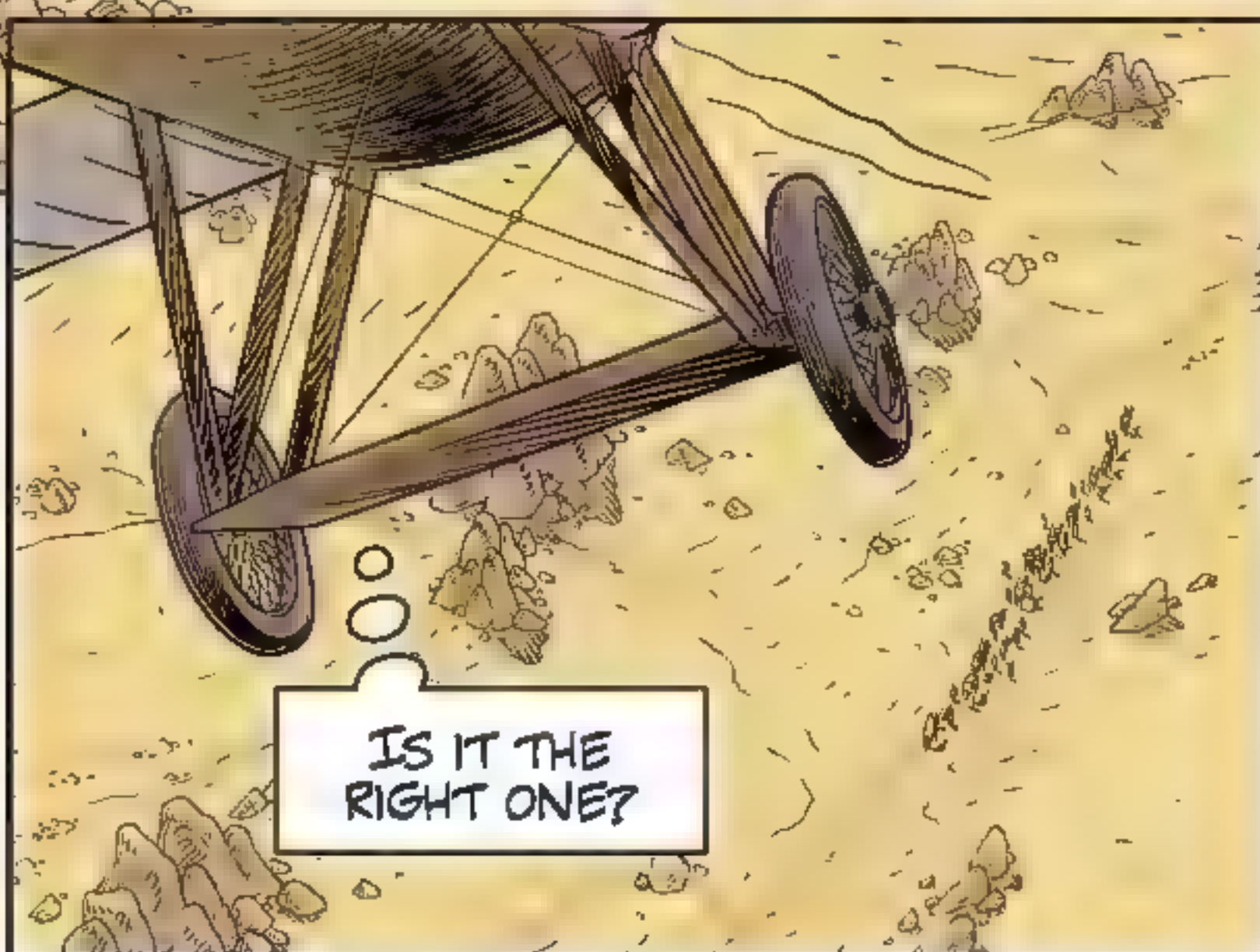
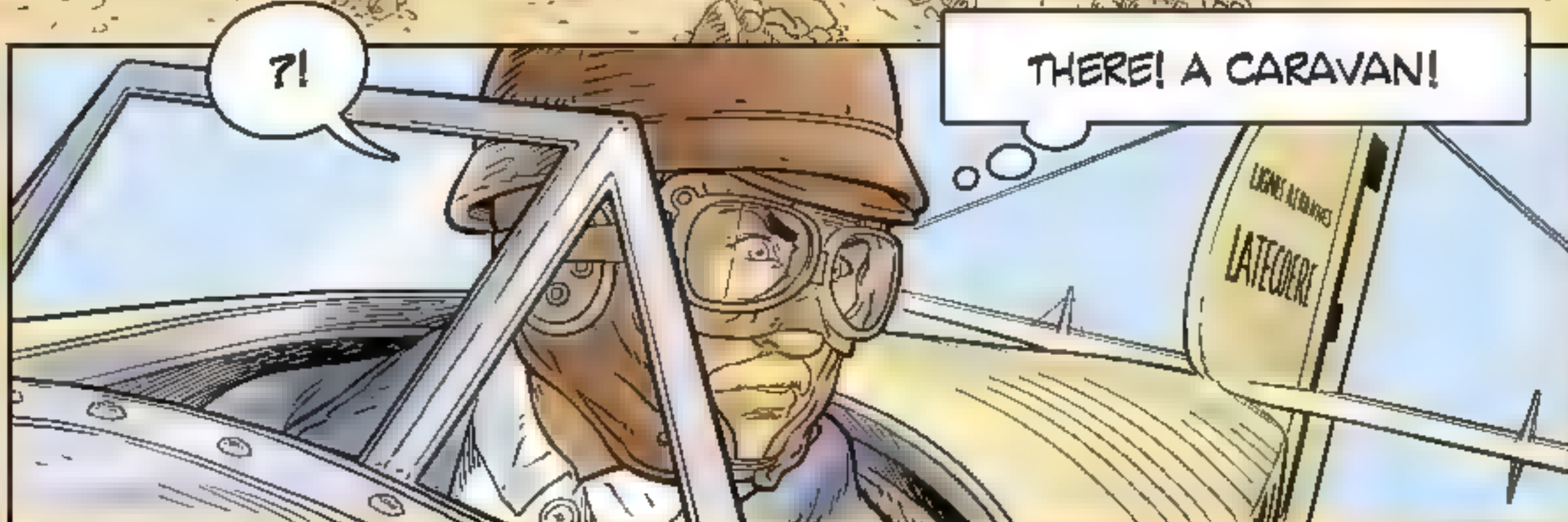
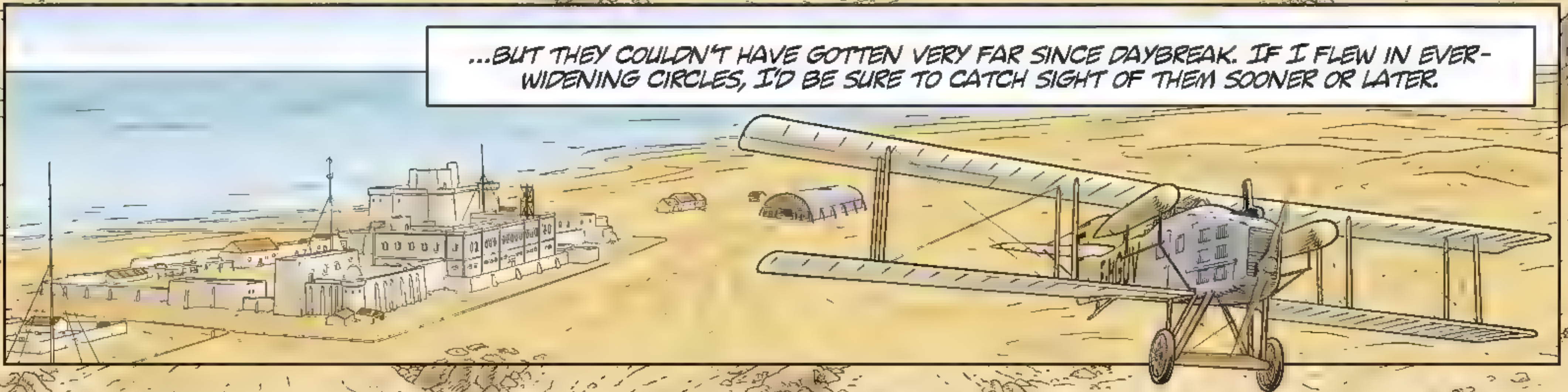
I RAN INTO A WHOLE ARMY OF THEM ONCE, AND THEIR CHIEF TOLD ME WE WERE LUCKY THAT FRANCE WAS MORE THAN A HUNDRED DAYS' CAMEL RIDE FROM HERE. HE WASN'T KIDDING, EITHER!



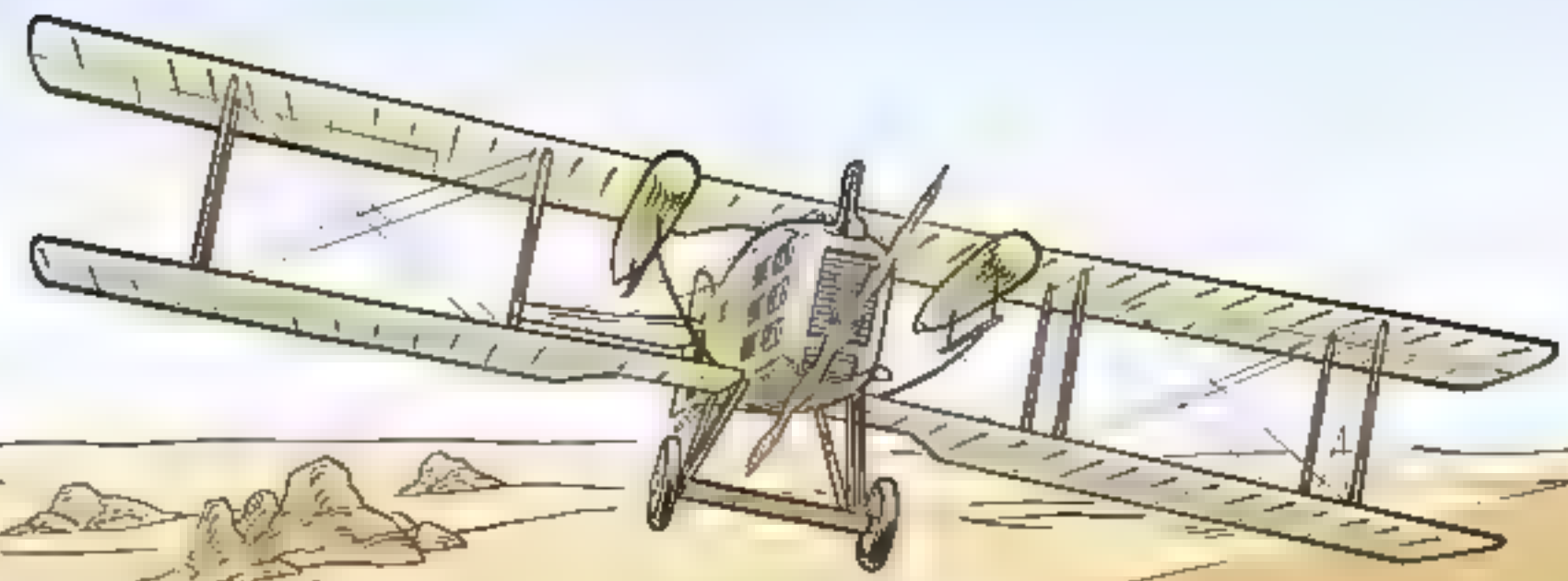
THEN WE'LL GAIN THEIR RESPECT BY TAKING BACK WHAT BELONGS TO US, AND BY PROVING THAT WE AREN'T AFRAID OF THEM.



THAT SCUMBAG RAGGI DIDN'T KNOW--OR MORE LIKELY, WOULDN'T TELL US--WHERE HIS COUSIN'S GROUP WERE HEADED...

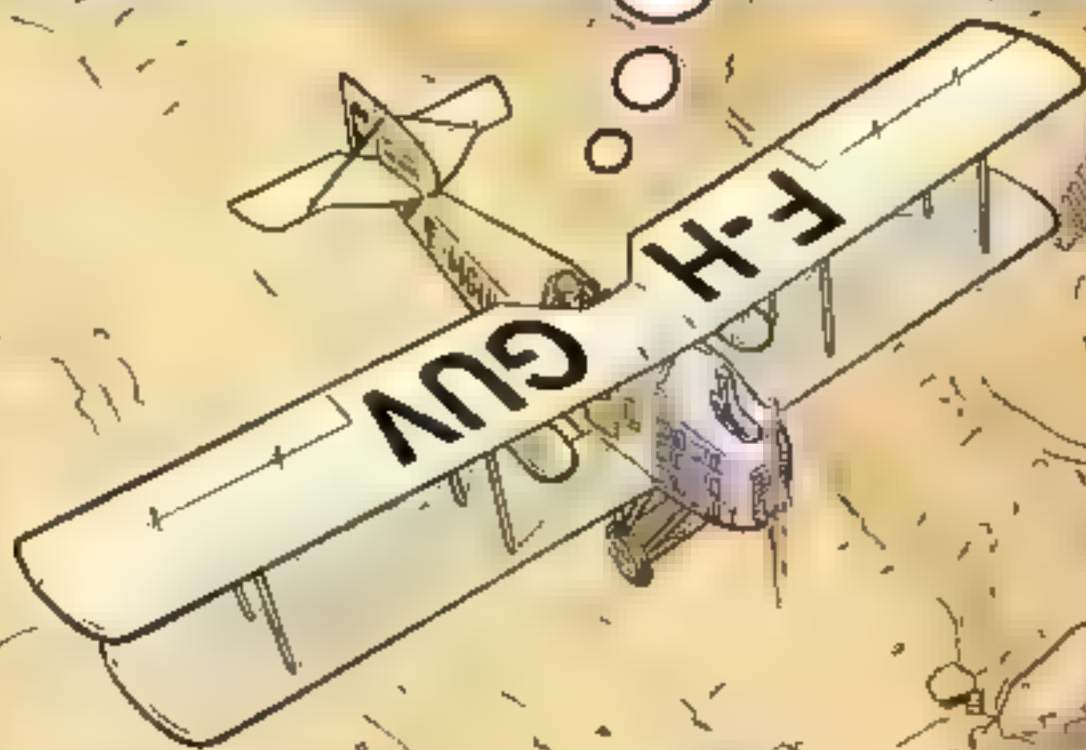


I DIDN'T SEE BARK, BUT I THINK I RECOGNIZED THEM AS REGUIBATS, RAGGI'S COUSIN'S TRIBE.



I WAS PRETTY SURE THAT THEY WERE THE ONES WE WERE LOOKING FOR, BUT I WASN'T GOING TO GO BACK AND CHECK. WE'D SURPRISED THEM THE FIRST TIME--NOW THEY'D BE READY FOR US.

EVEN WITH THEIR PREHISTORIC PEA-SHOOTERS, THEY MIGHT HIT ONE OF US OR DAMAGE OUR ENGINE.



OK, THIS IS FAR ENOUGH AWAY. THEY CAN'T SEE OR HEAR THE PLANE ANYMORE.

THEY WERE HEADING SOUTH-EAST AND SAW ME FLYING WEST...

IF I FOLLOW AN ARC TO THE SOUTH, I'LL GET AHEAD OF THEM AND LAND OUT OF SIGHT.

BUT I NEED TO PLOT MY FLIGHT PATH CAREFULLY SO I CAN GET BACK TO WHERE THEY ARE.

DONNERWETTER! EVERYWHERE LOOKS THE SAME!

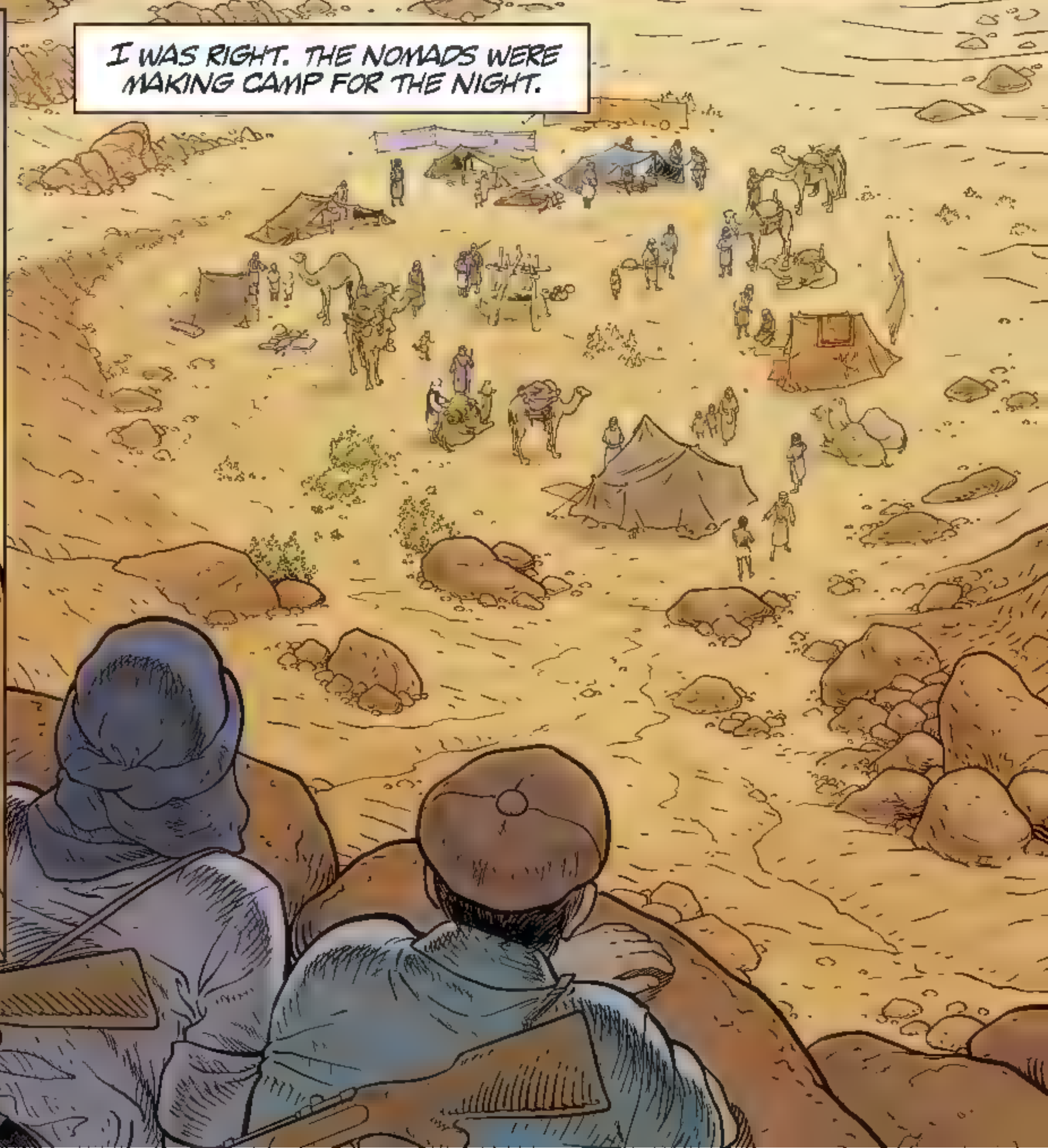
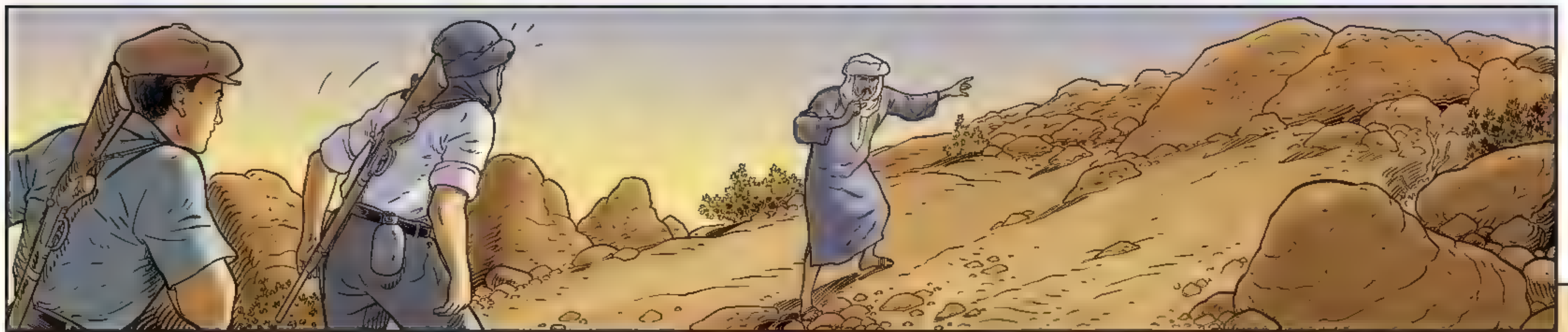
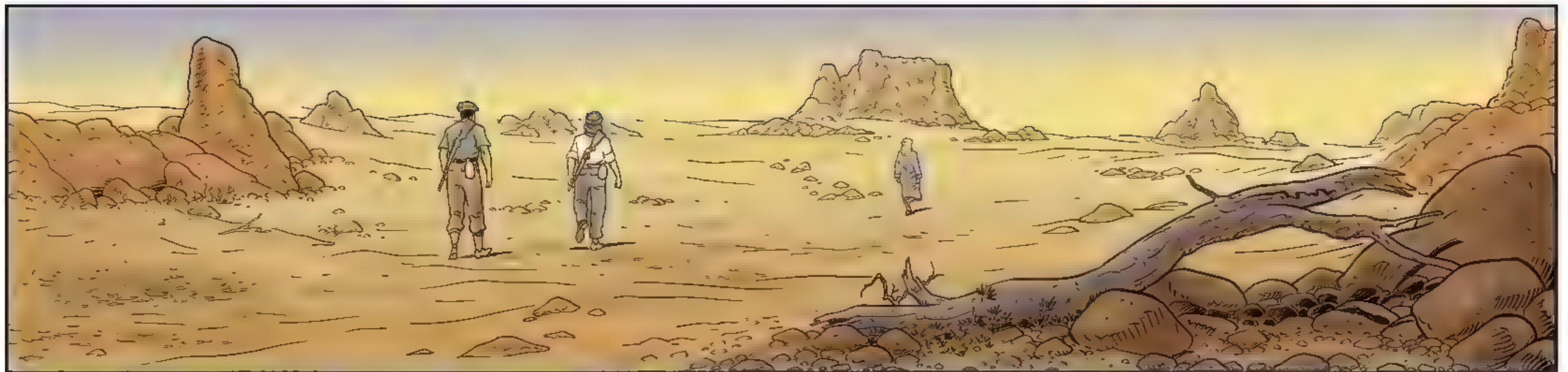
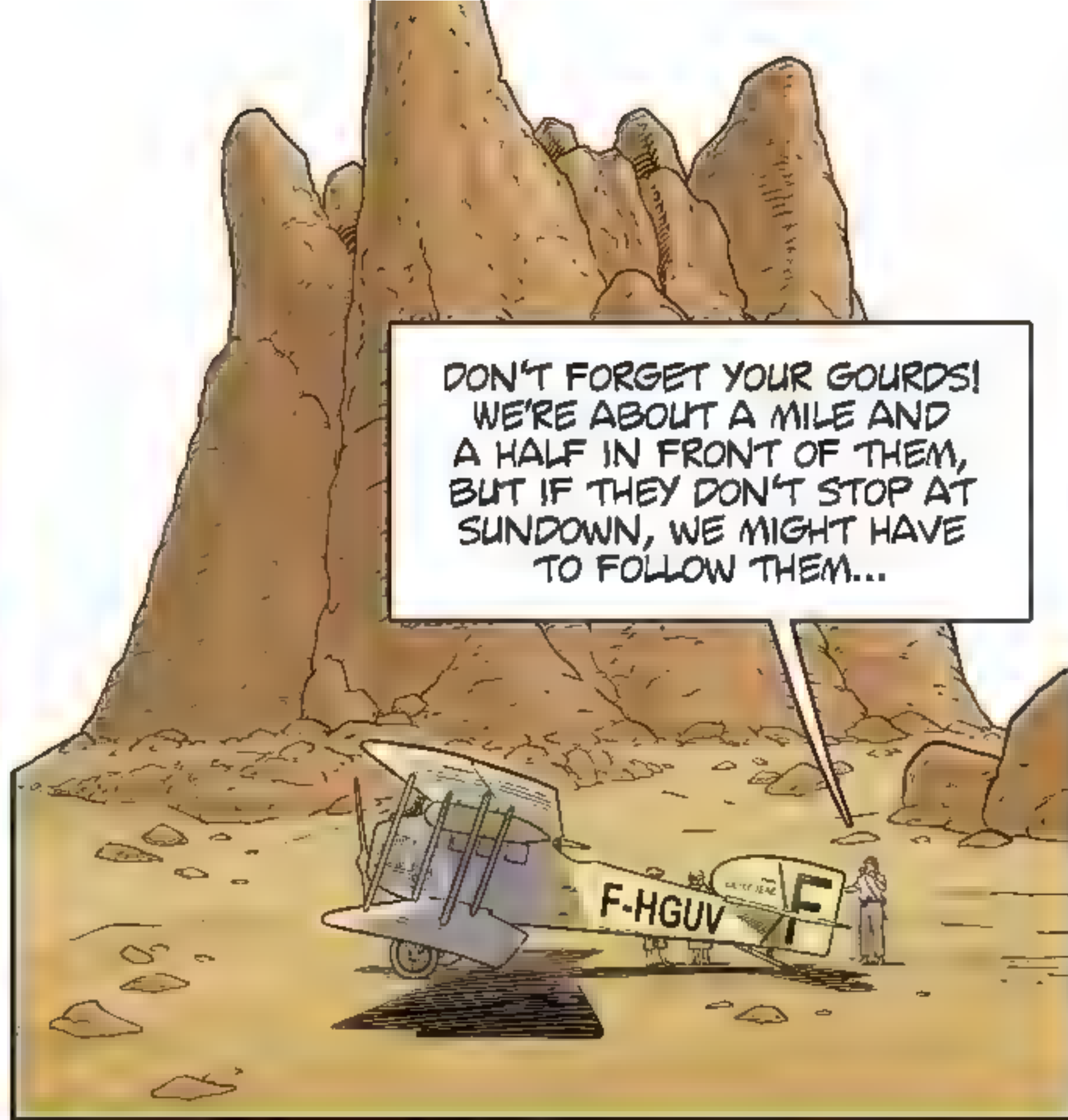
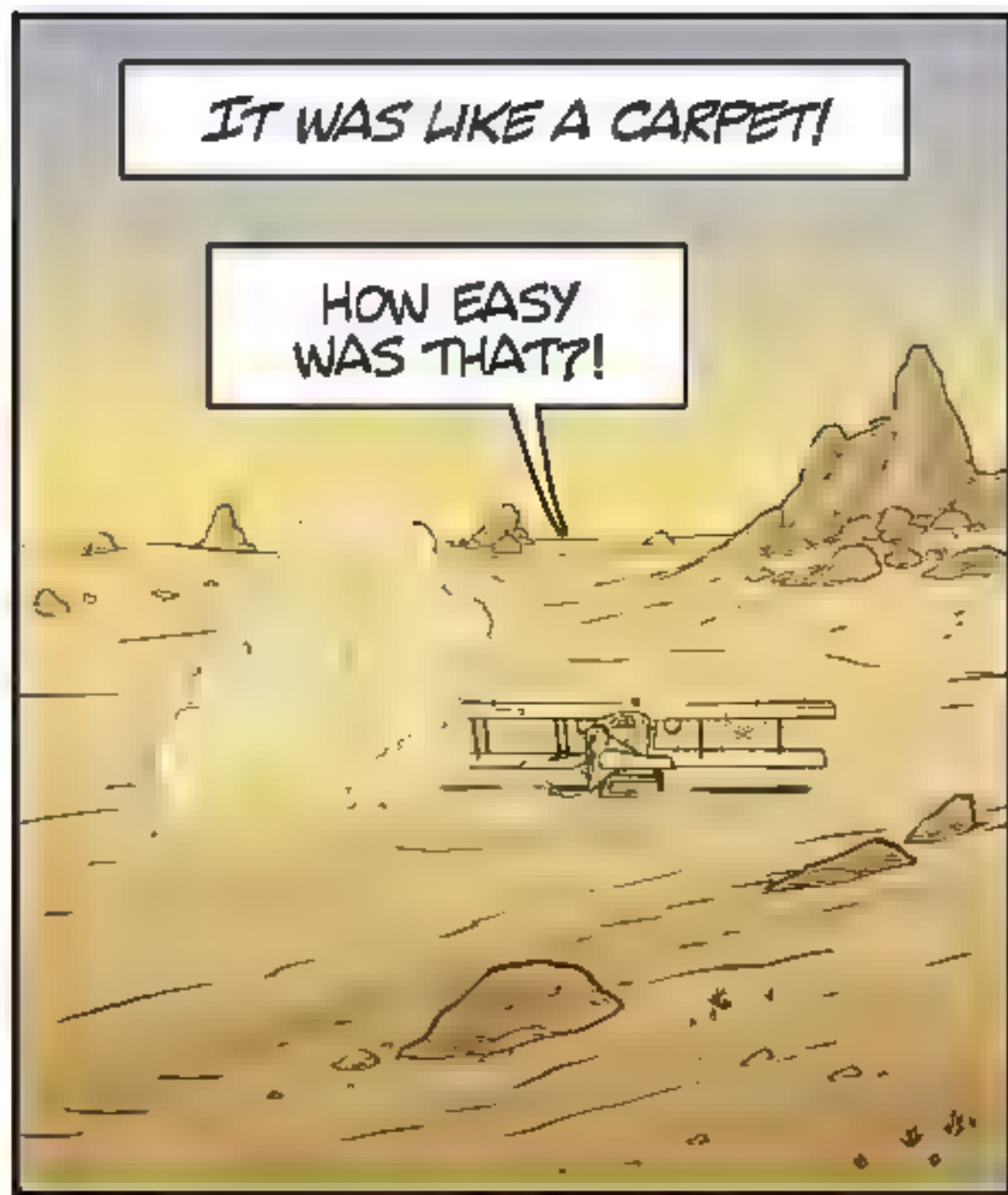
I WAS SO IMPATIENT TO GET TO THEM THAT TEN MINUTES FELT LIKE AN HOUR.

IT'S LATE AFTERNOON. THE CARAVAN WILL HALT AT SUNSET, SO THERE'S NO POINT GOING MUCH FURTHER.

THAT ODDLY SHAPED ROCK IS THE PERFECT LANDMARK! I'LL PUT HER DOWN NEARBY...

AFTER A QUICK SCOUT AROUND, I FOUND A SANDY AREA WITHOUT TOO MANY STONES. I HAD TO AVOID EITHER BUSTING A WHEEL ON A ROCK OR FLOWING INTO DEEP SAND AND ENDING UP LOOKING LIKE A METAL TREE.

GOTT MIT UNS!

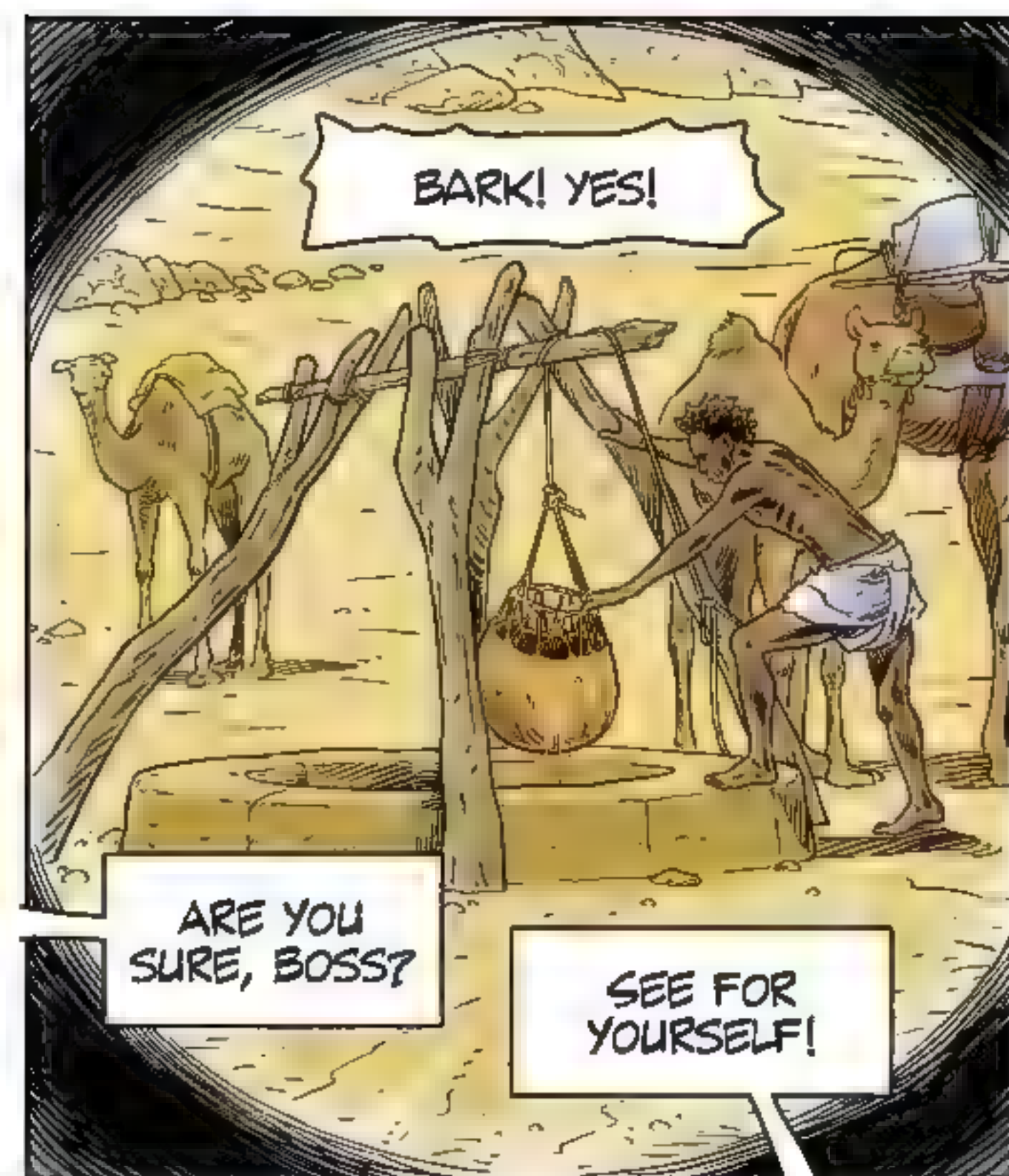




BUT WAS IT THE RIGHT TRIBE?
AND WAS BARK WITH THEM?



I SCANNED THE CAMP INTENTLY.
CLEARLY, THEY SUSPECTED
NOTHING.



BARK! YES!

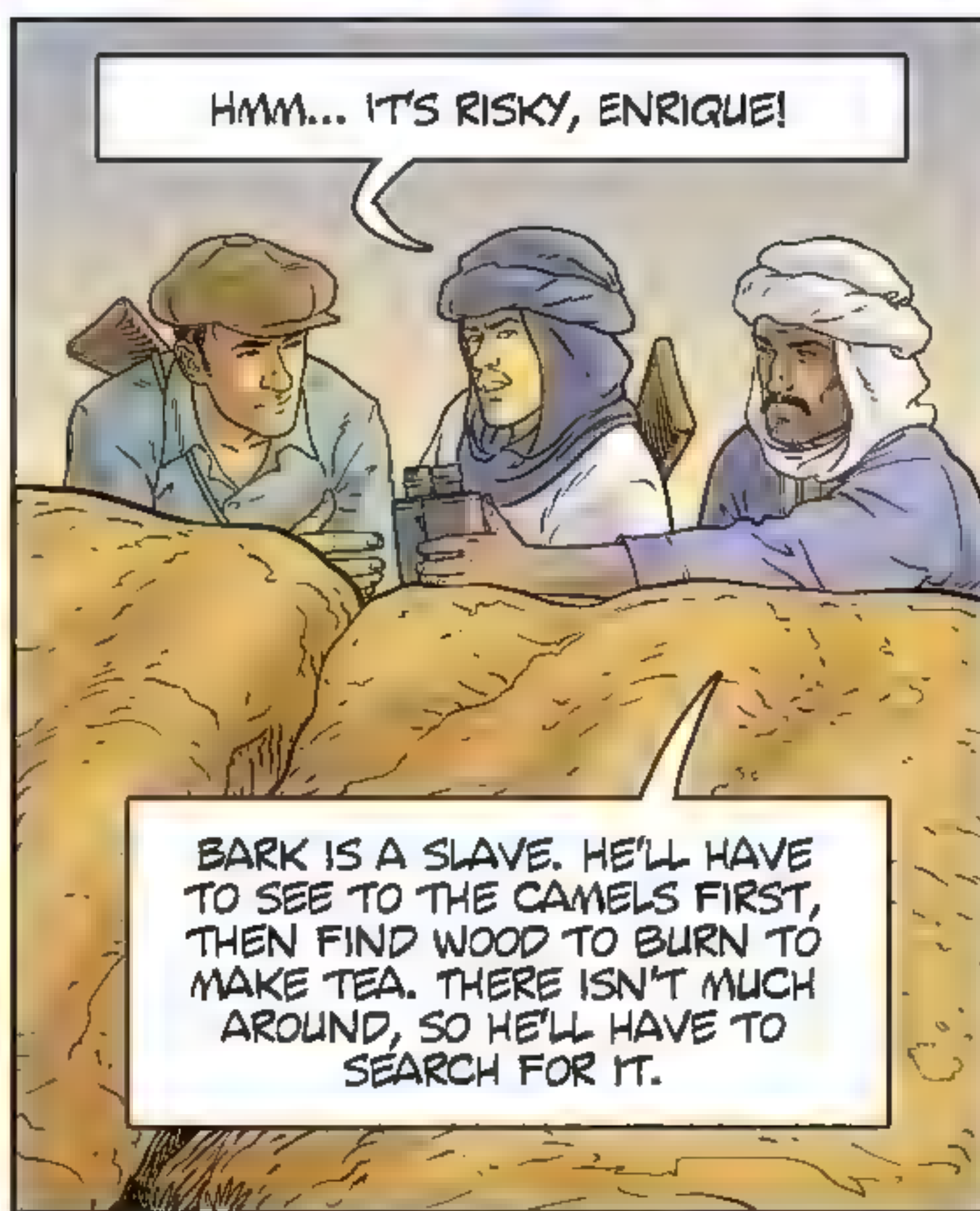
ARE YOU
SURE, BOSS?

SEE FOR
YOURSELF!



SO HOW ARE WE
GONNA GET HIM OUT
OF THERE?

WE WAIT FOR IT TO GET DARK, AND
SEE WHICH TENT HE'S IN. IF THERE'S
A GUARD, I'LL TAKE HIM OUT.



HMM... IT'S RISKY, ENRIQUE!

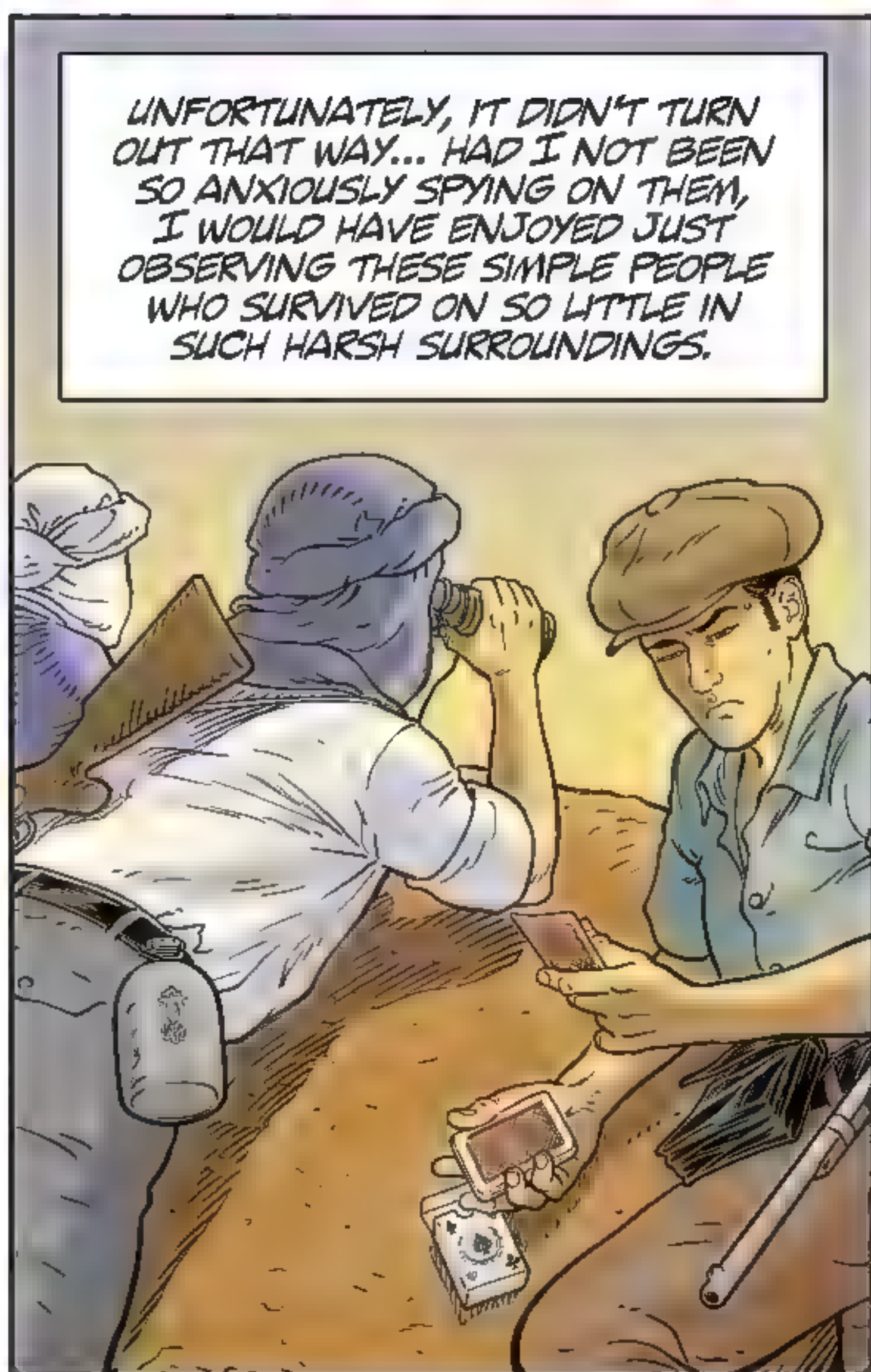
BARK IS A SLAVE. HE'LL HAVE
TO SEE TO THE CAMELS FIRST,
THEN FIND WOOD TO BURN TO
MAKE TEA. THERE ISN'T MUCH
AROUND, SO HE'LL HAVE TO
SEARCH FOR IT.



WILL THEY LET A SLAVE WANDER
AWAY FROM THE CAMP?

HE CAN'T ESCAPE--
THERE'S NO FOOD
OR WATER...

OF COURSE. LET'S HOPE THIS
SLAVE WILL DECIDE TO WANDER
IN OUR DIRECTION.



UNFORTUNATELY, IT DIDN'T TURN
OUT THAT WAY... HAD I NOT BEEN
SO ANXIOUSLY SPYING ON THEM,
I WOULD HAVE ENJOYED JUST
OBSERVING THESE SIMPLE PEOPLE
WHO SURVIVED ON SO LITTLE IN
SUCH HARSH SURROUNDINGS.

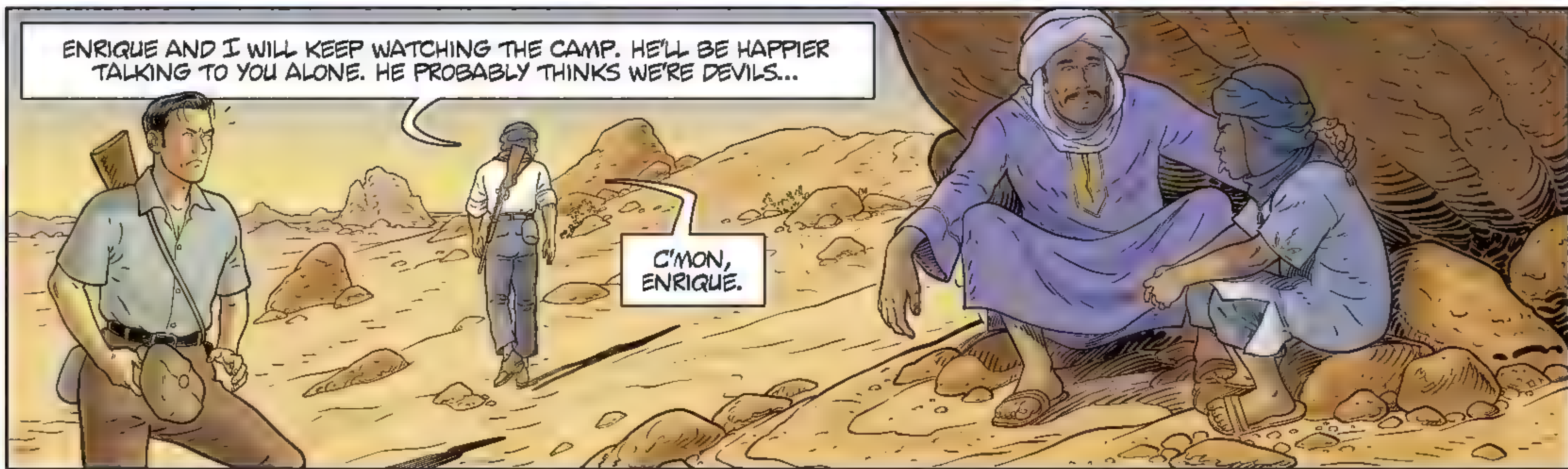
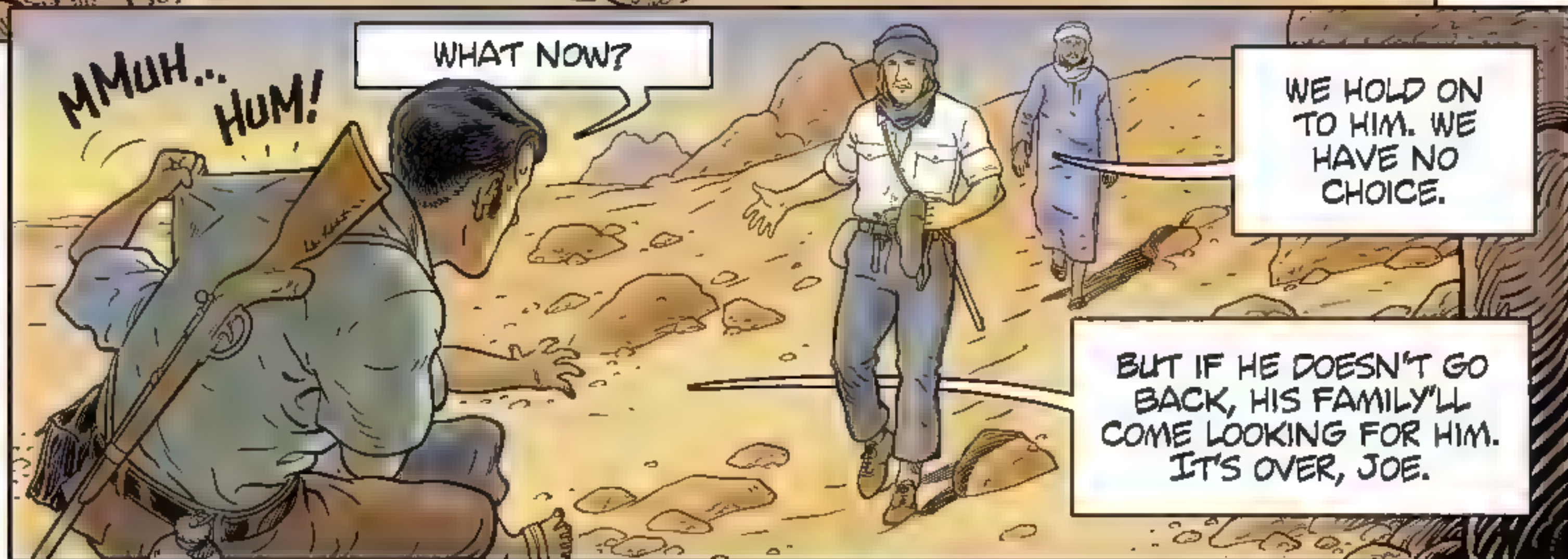


THEIR ECONOMICAL MOVEMENTS SEEMED
TO EMBODY AN ANCESTRAL WISDOM
BORN OF THE RELENTLESS HEAT AND
AN INEVITABLE FATALISM.



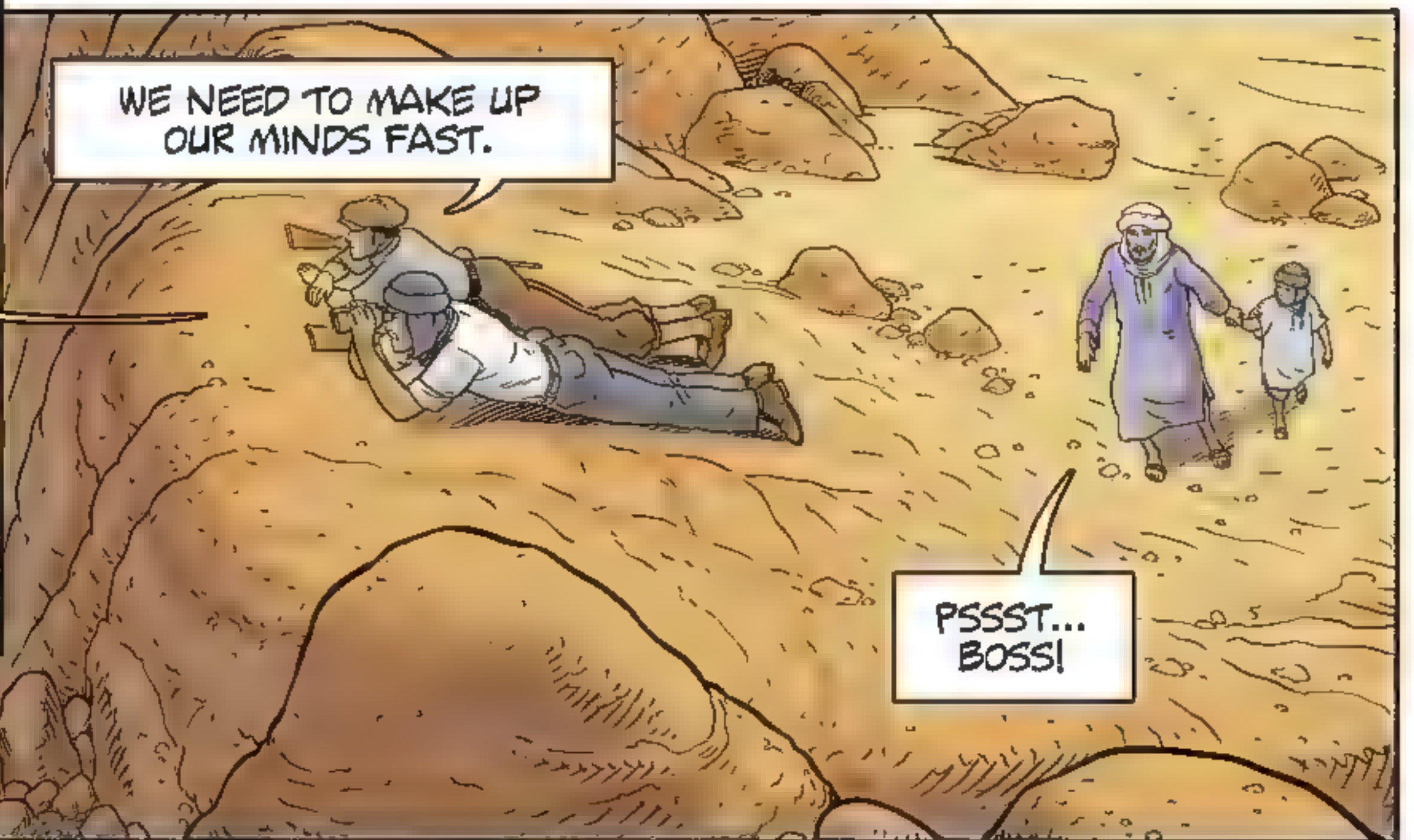
¡MIERDA! WE HAVE A VISITOR, MY
FRIENDS, BUT NOT THE ONE WE
WERE HOPING FOR.

?!



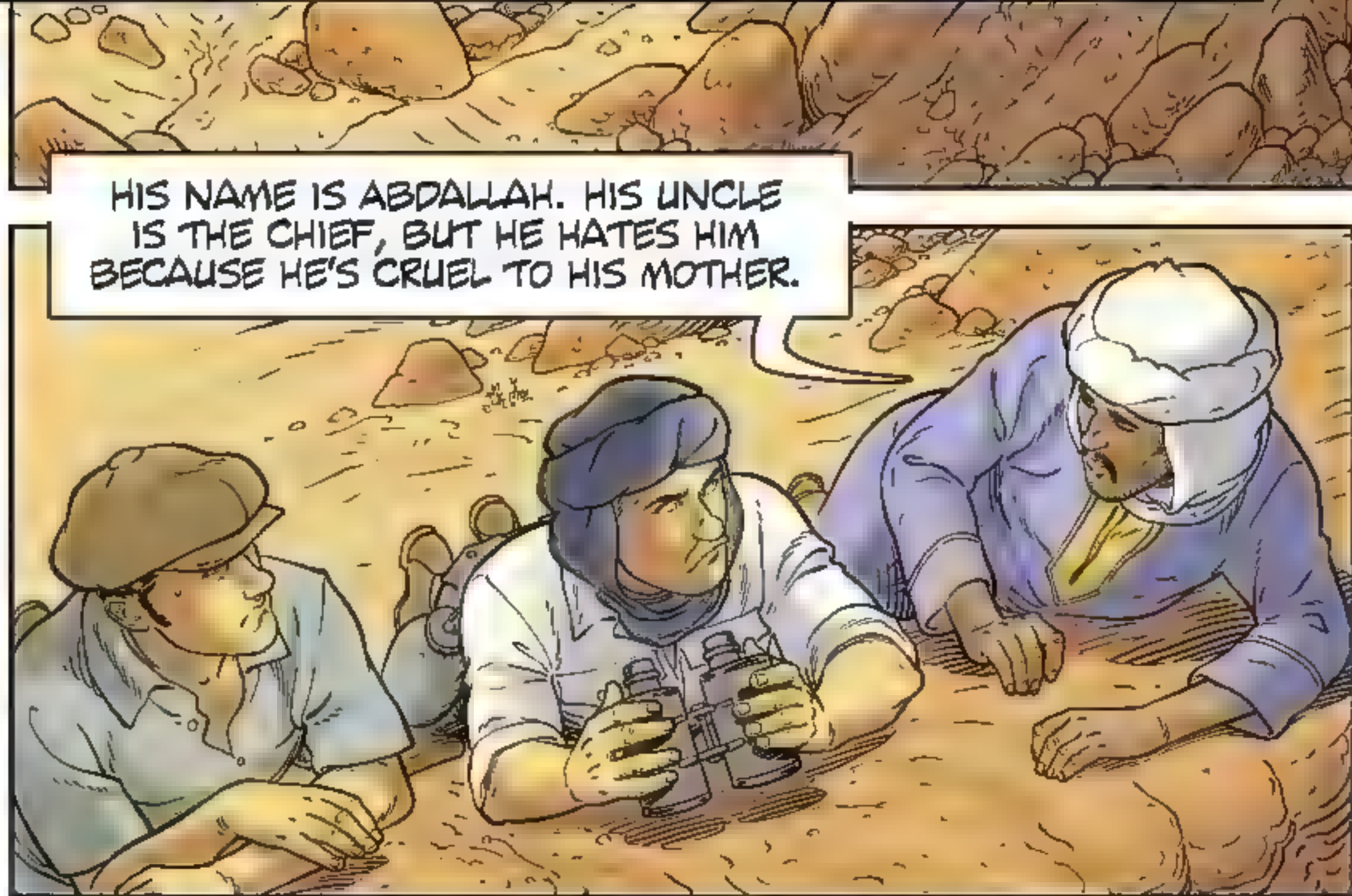


HEY! LOOKS LIKE THEY'RE GETTING RILED DOWN THERE...

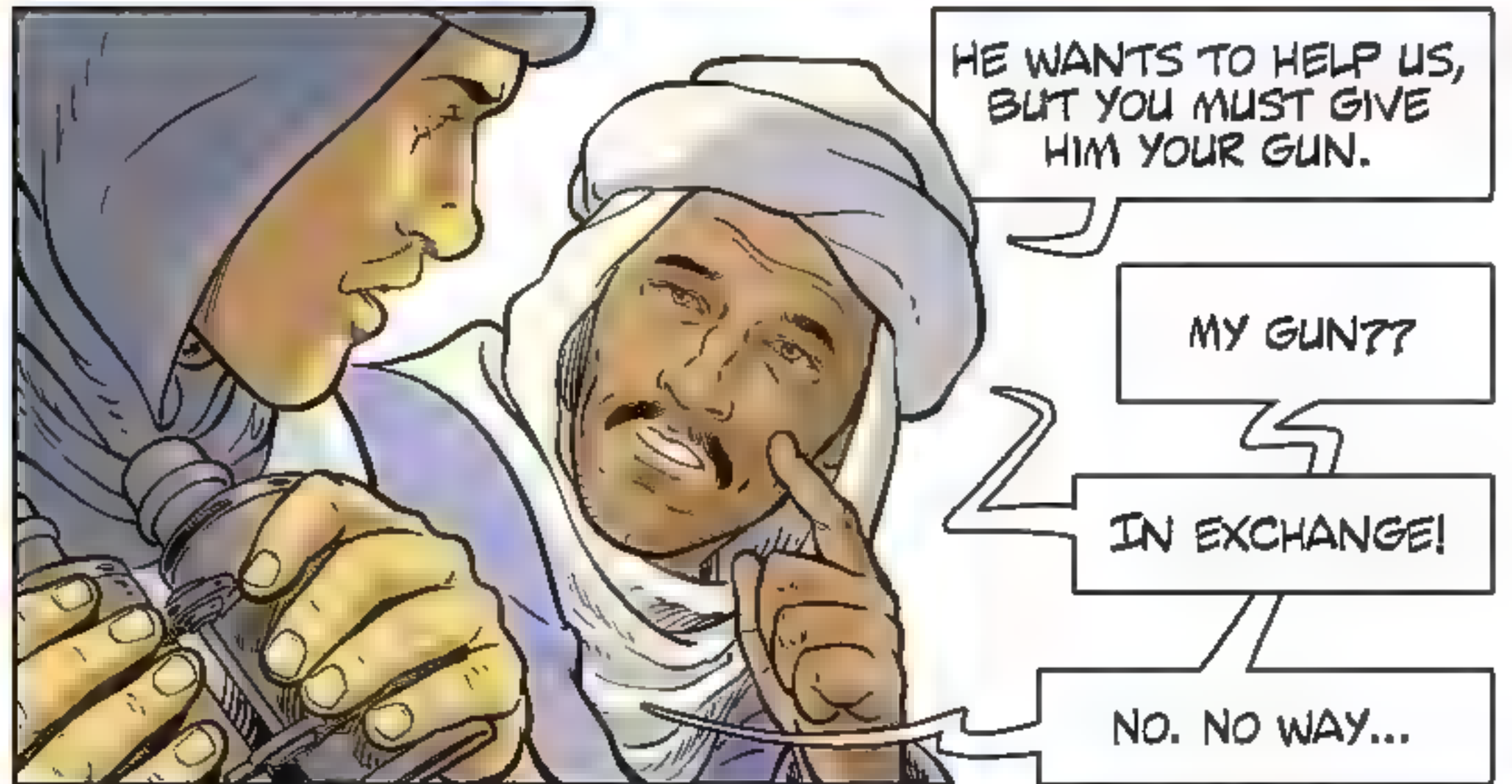


WE NEED TO MAKE UP OUR MINDS FAST.

PSSST... BOSSI!



HIS NAME IS ABDALLAH. HIS UNCLE IS THE CHIEF, BUT HE HATES HIM BECAUSE HE'S CRUEL TO HIS MOTHER.

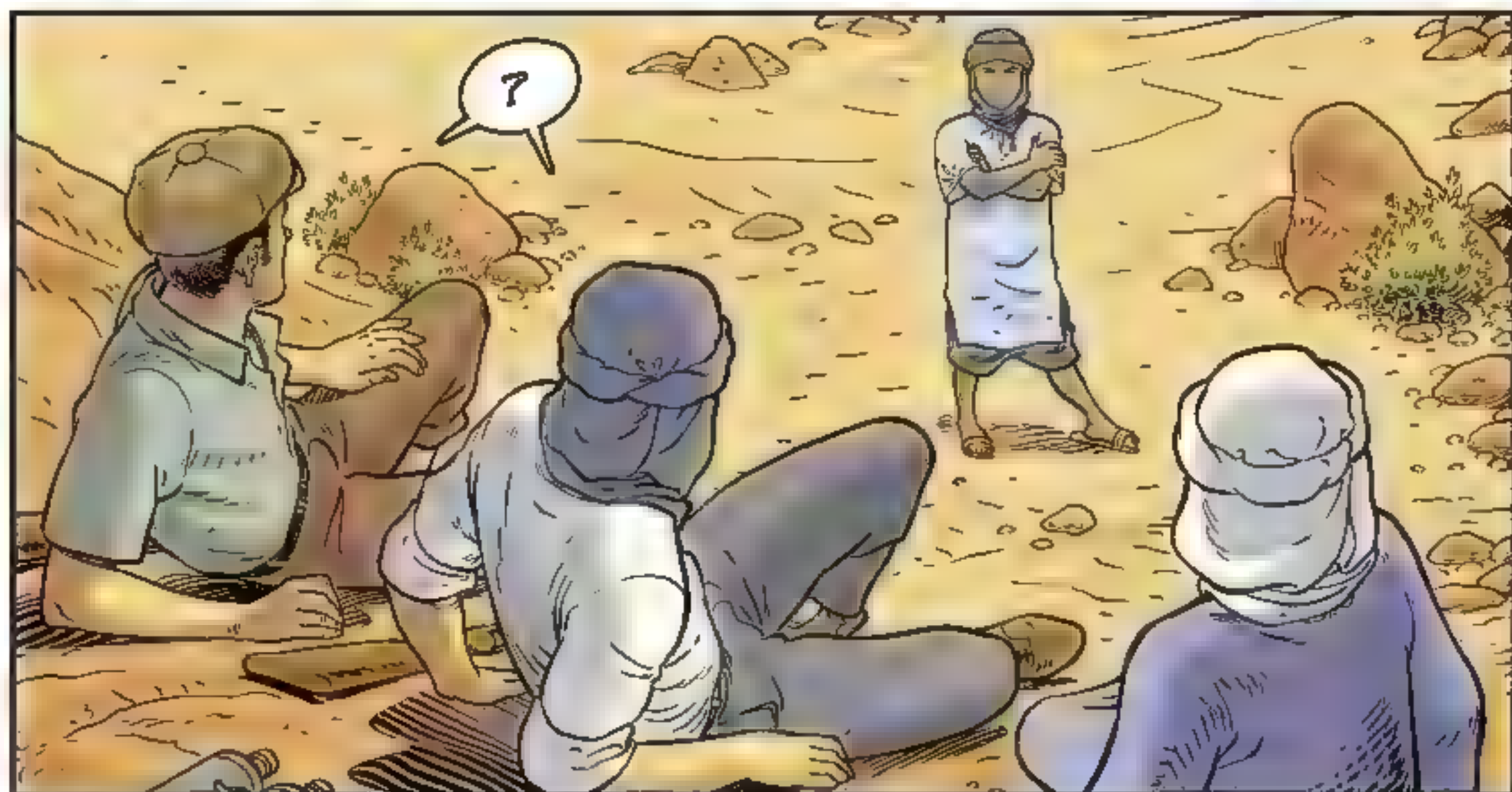


HE WANTS TO HELP US, BUT YOU MUST GIVE HIM YOUR GUN.

MY GUN??

IN EXCHANGE!

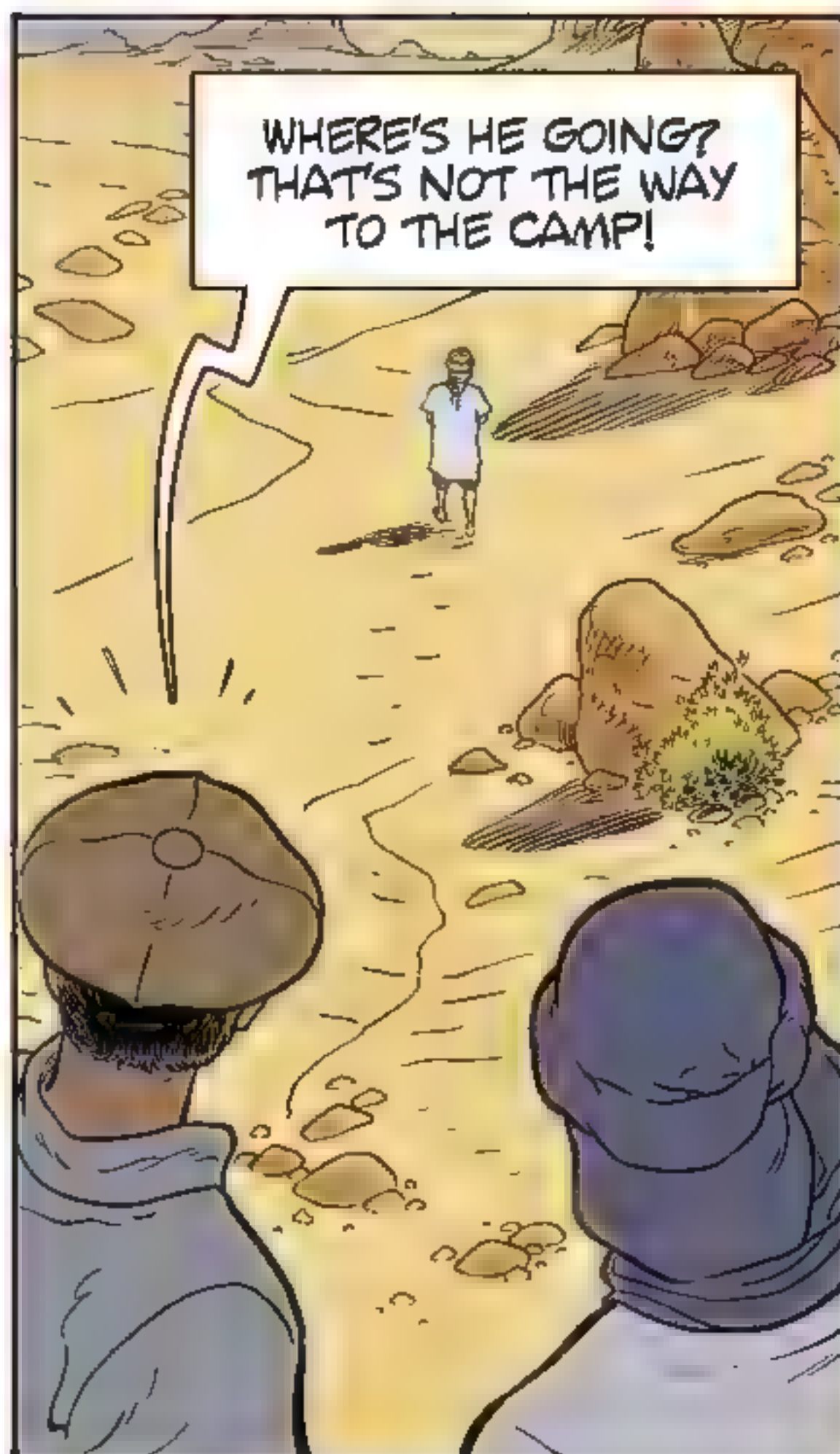
NO. NO WAY...



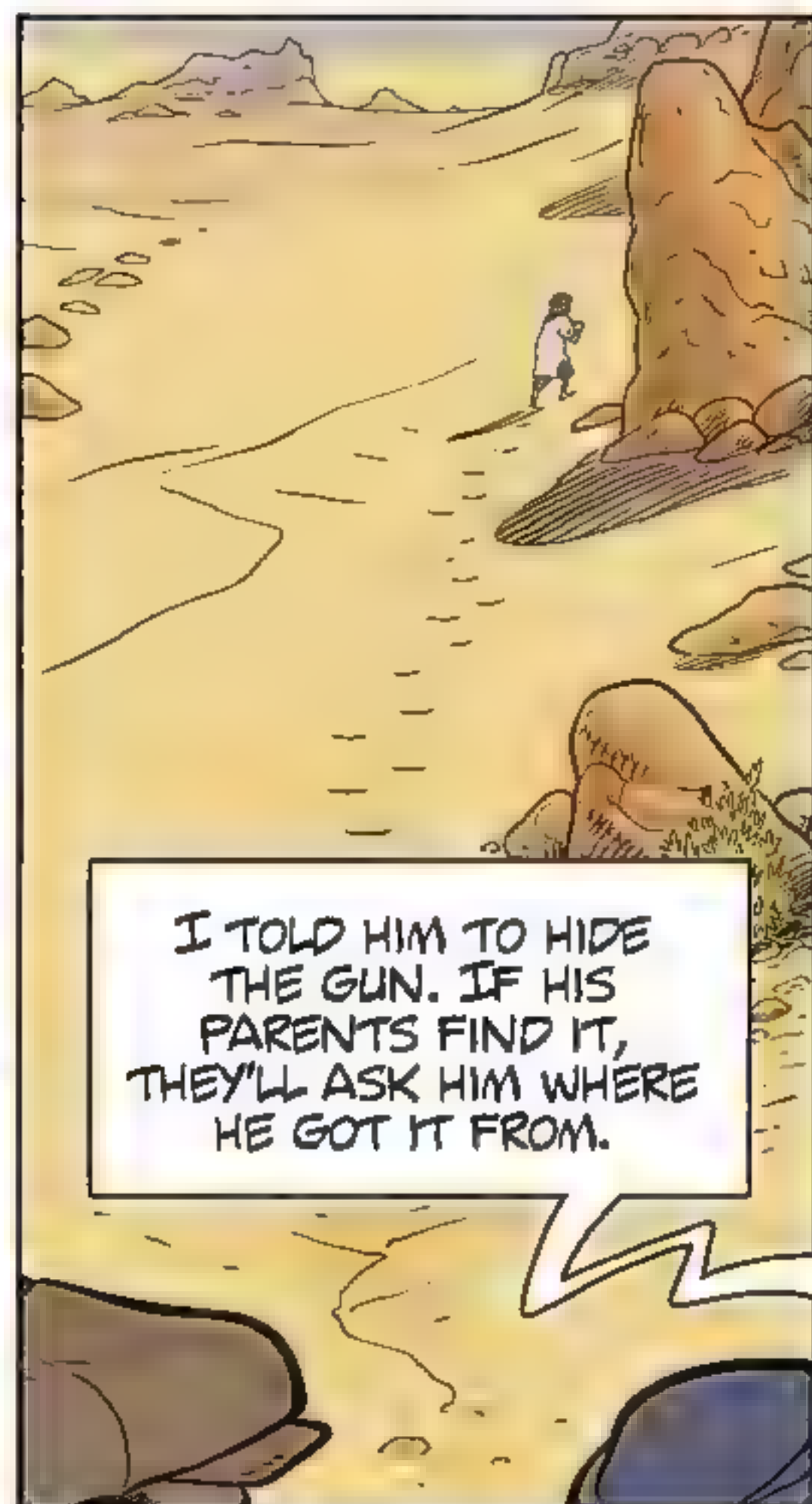
?



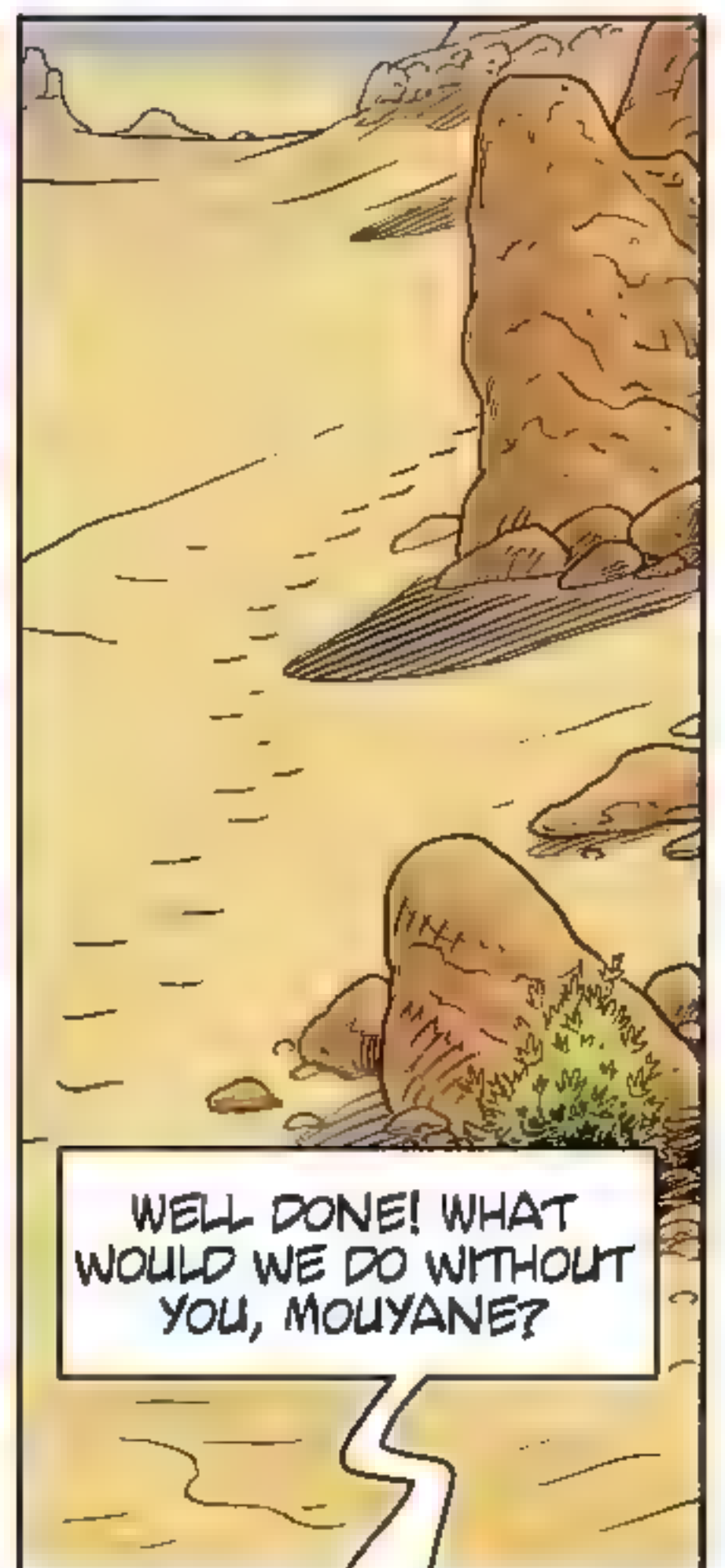
MAKE UP YOUR MIND, JOSEFI! THEY'RE FORMING SEARCH PARTIES...



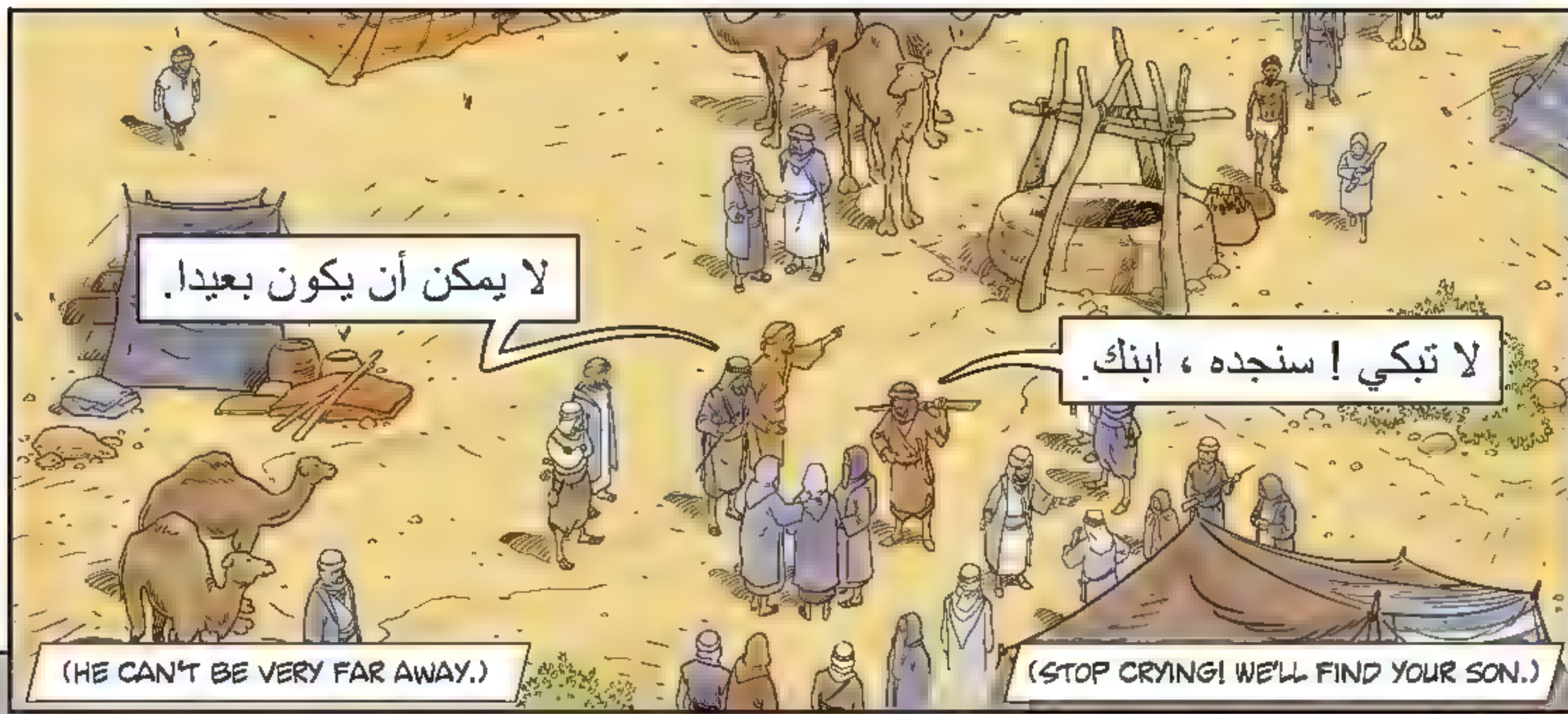
WHERE'S HE GOING? THAT'S NOT THE WAY TO THE CAMP!



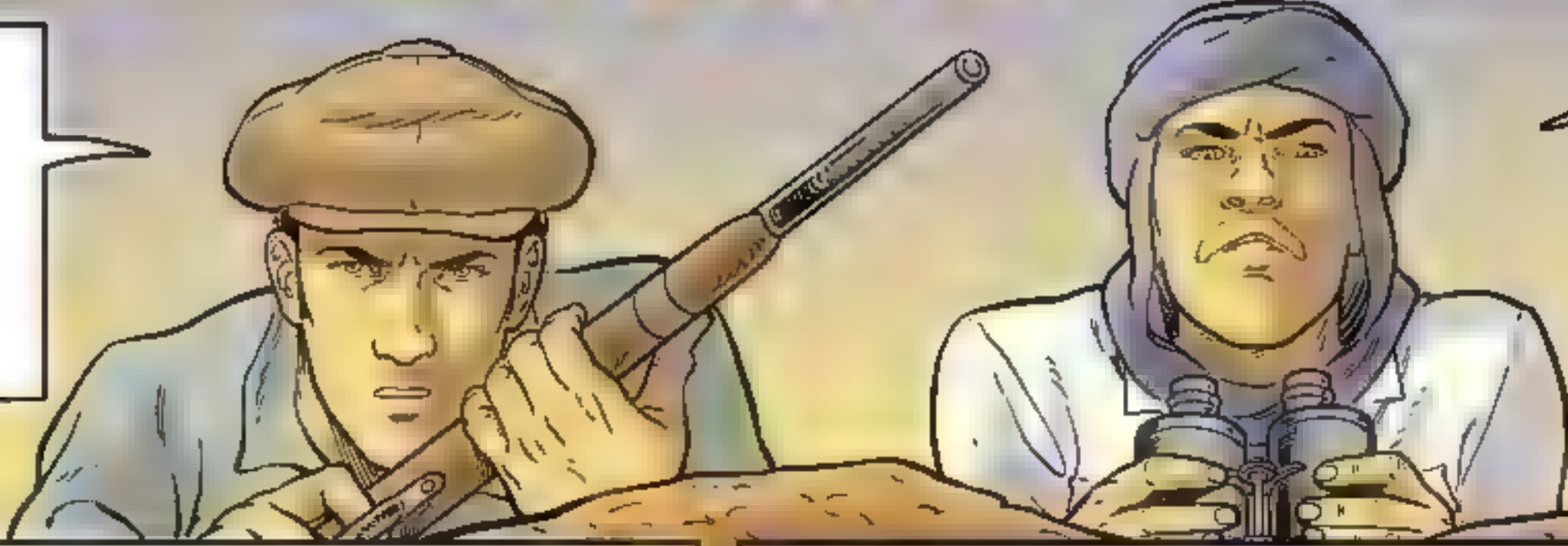
I TOLD HIM TO HIDE THE GUN. IF HIS PARENTS FIND IT, THEY'LL ASK HIM WHERE HE GOT IT FROM.



WELL DONE! WHAT WOULD WE DO WITHOUT YOU, MOUYANE?

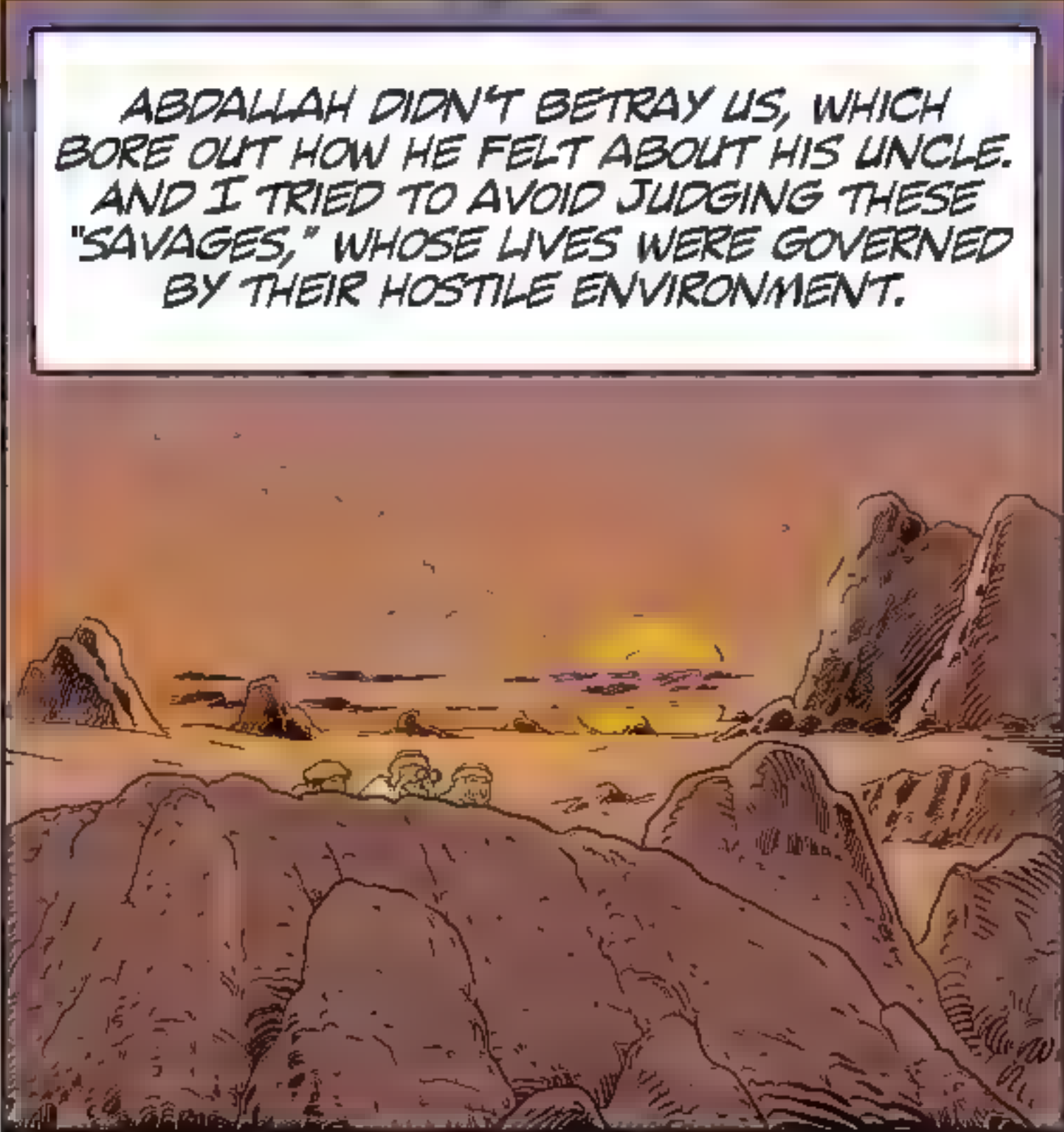


RIGHT, THE KID'S BACK... THIS IS THE MOMENT OF TRUTH.



WILL HE BETRAY US OR TELL BARK THAT WE'RE HERE? BE READY TO SHOOT!

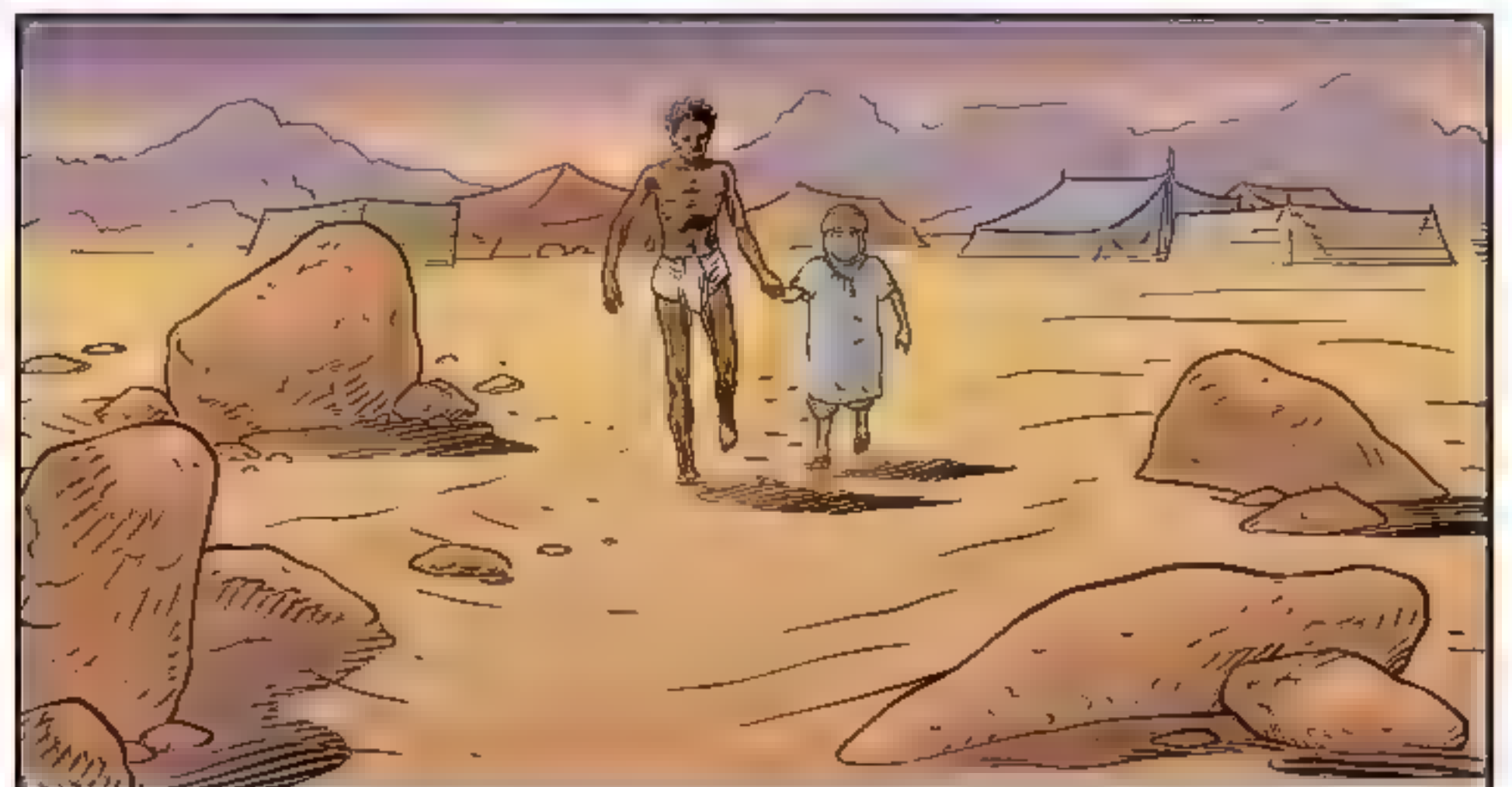
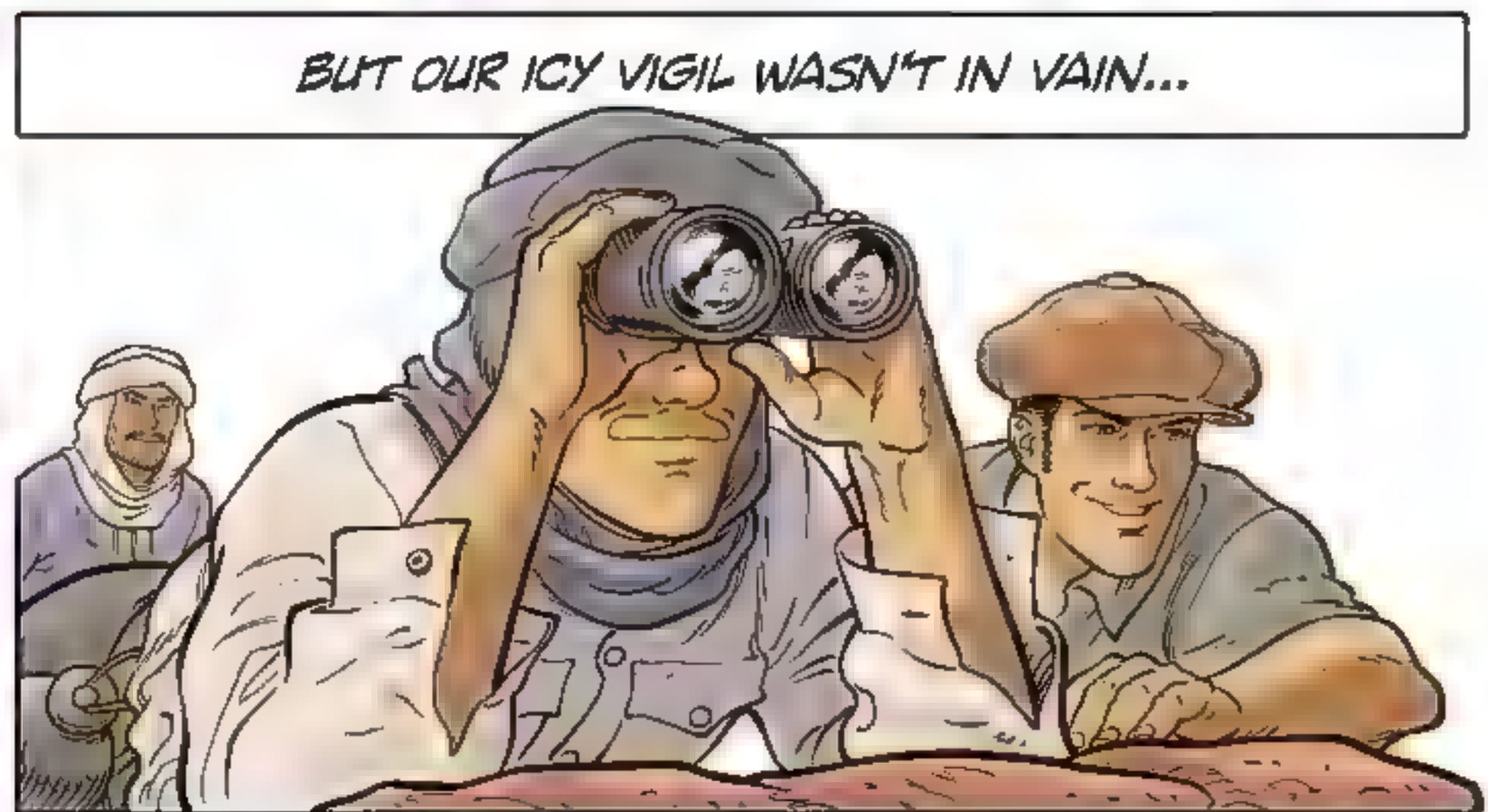
HE WON'T GIVE US AWAY. HE WANTS BULLETS... SO HE CAN KILL HIS UNCLE.



ABDALLAH DIDN'T BETRAY US, WHICH BORE OUT HOW HE FELT ABOUT HIS UNCLE. AND I TRIED TO AVOID JUDGING THESE "SAVAGES," WHOSE LIVES WERE GOVERNED BY THEIR HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT.

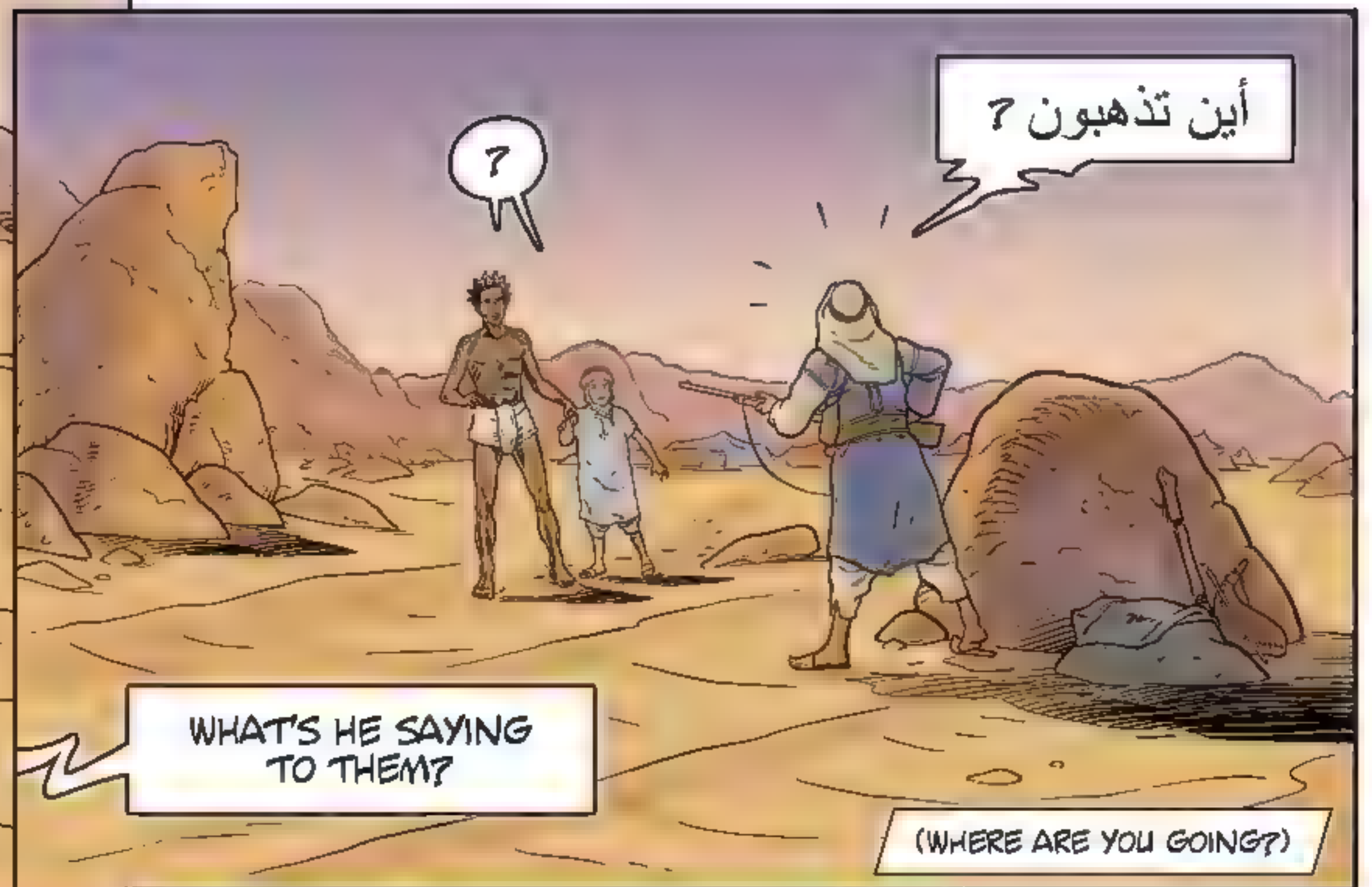


BUT BARK DIDN'T SHOW.





SHIT!!

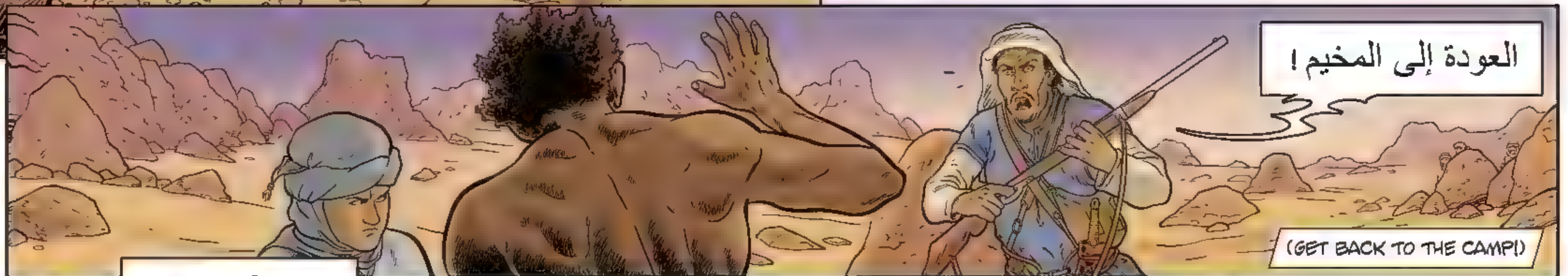


أين تذهبون ؟

?

WHAT'S HE SAYING TO THEM?

(WHERE ARE YOU GOING?)



العودة إلى المخيم !

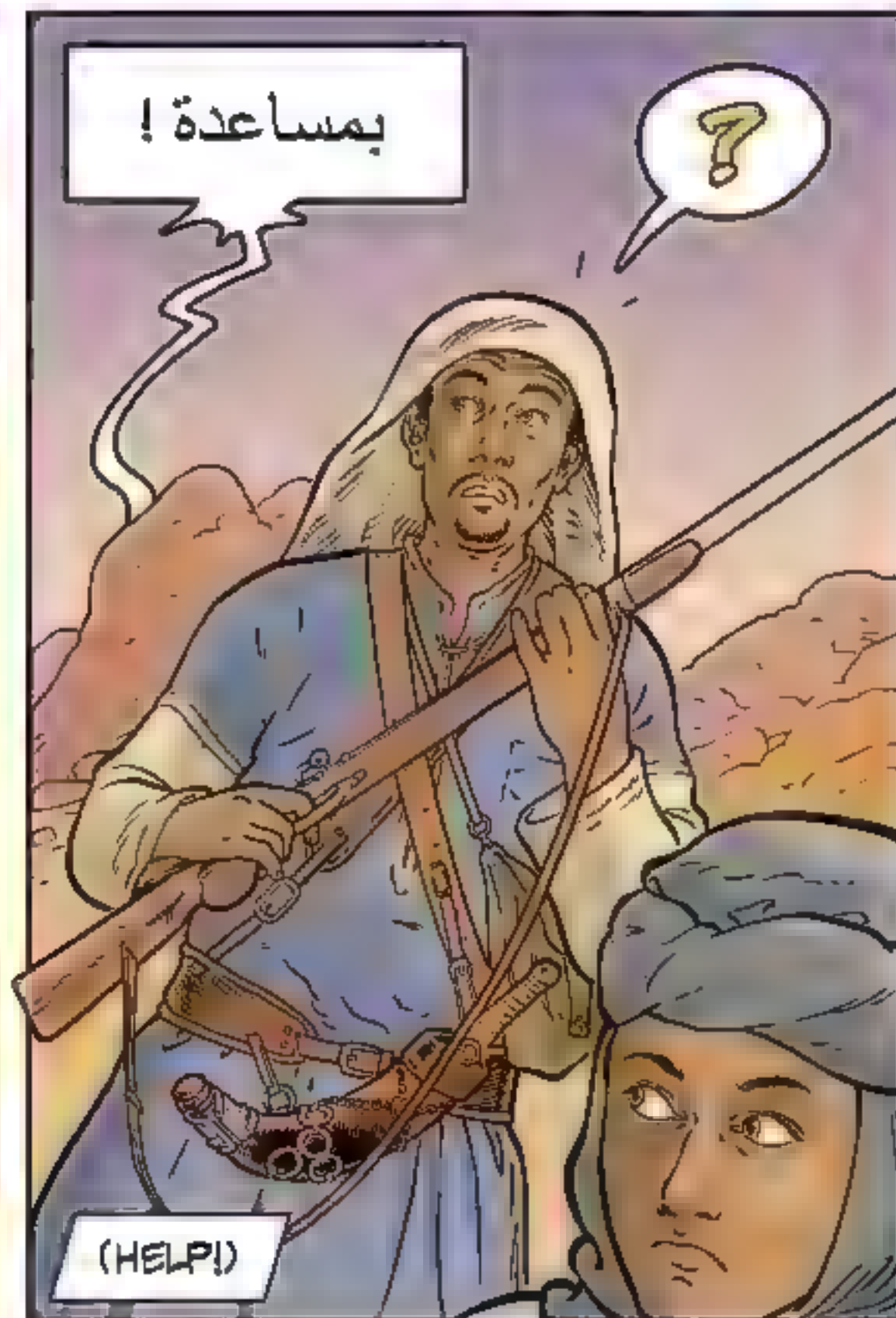
(GET BACK TO THE CAMP!)



SHALL I KILL THIS ASSHOLE?

NO...! THE NOISE WILL WAKE THE WHOLE TRIBE...

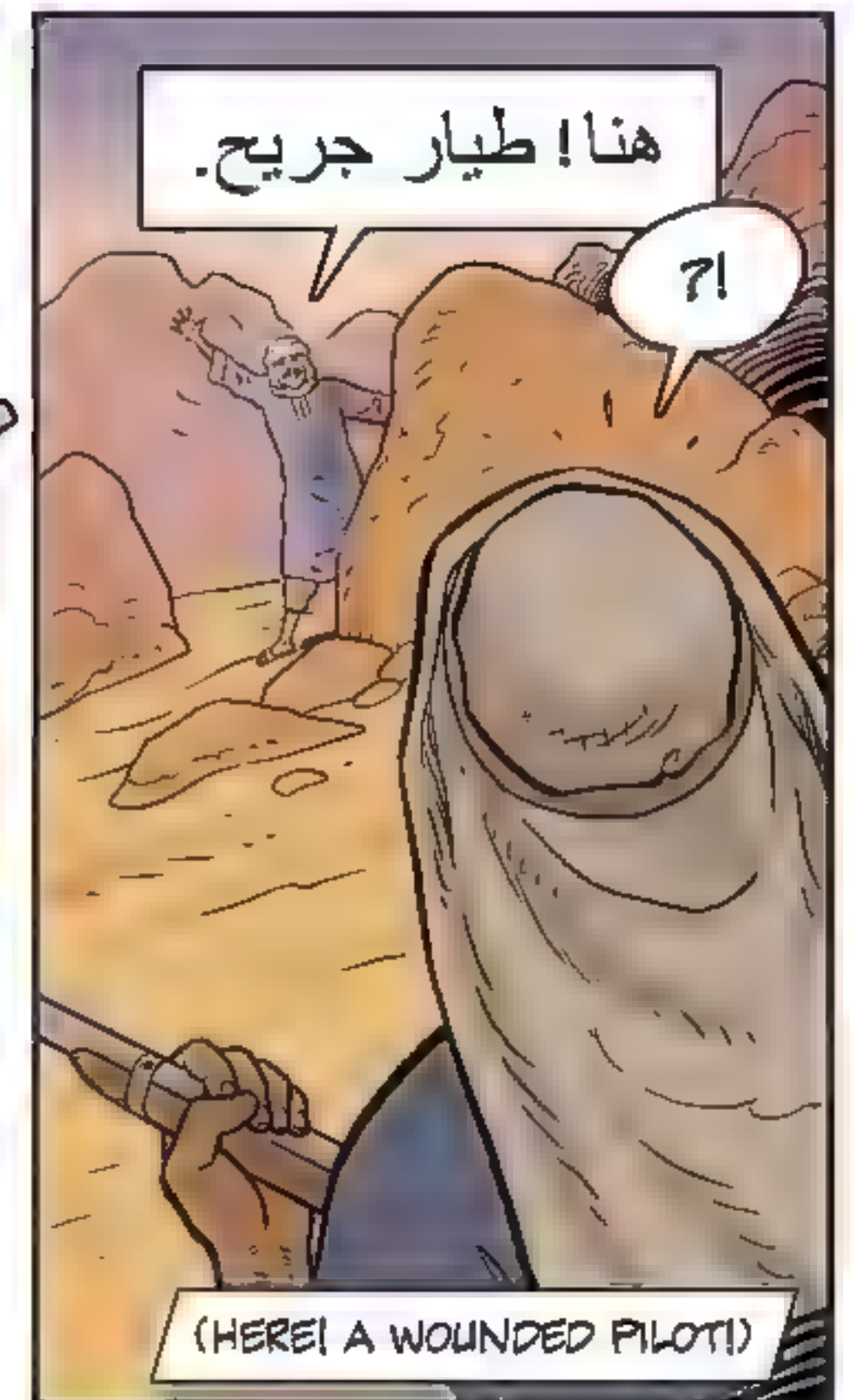
GOT TO THINK FAST!



بمساعدة !

?

(HELP!)



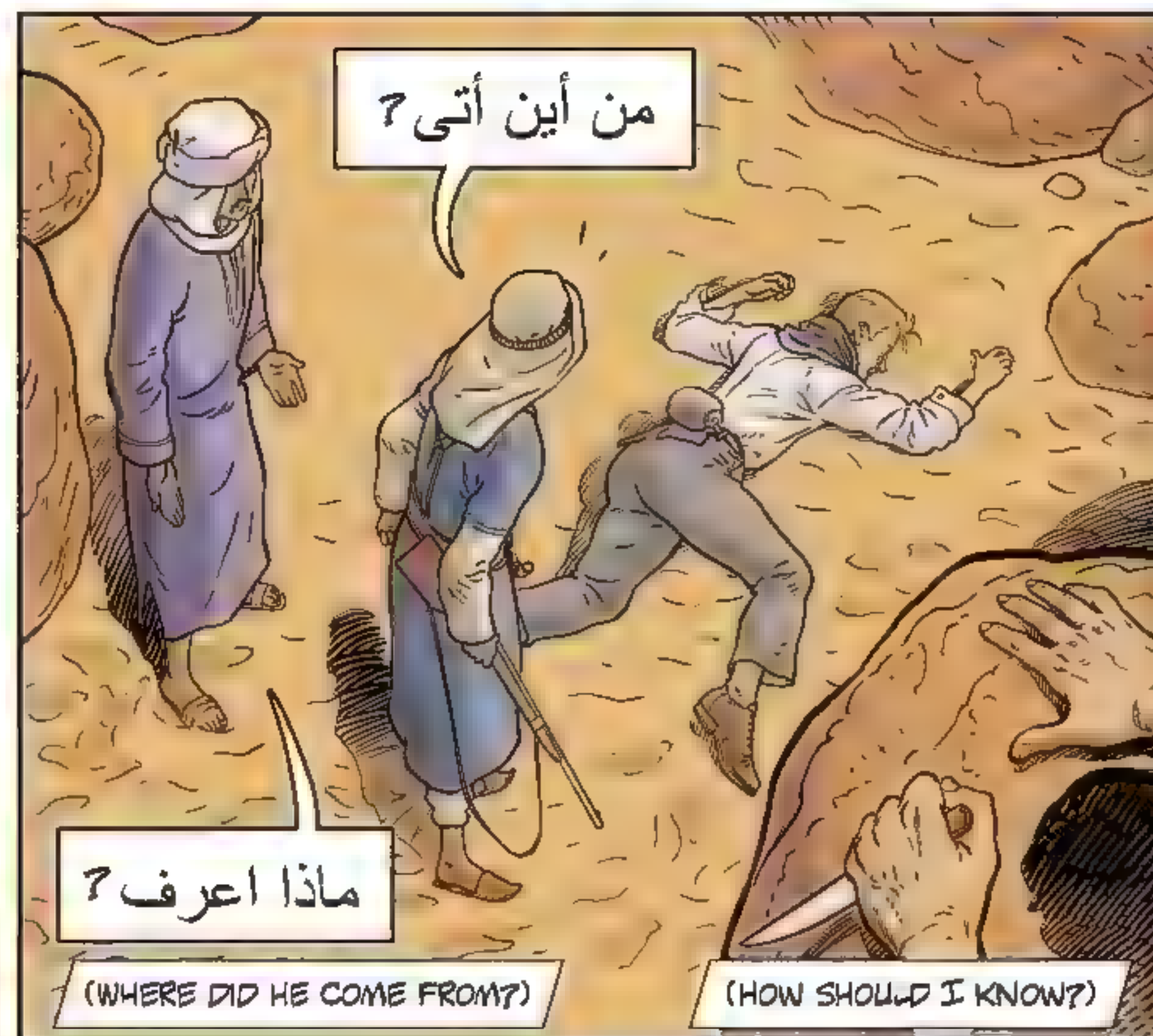
هنا! طيار جريح.

!?

(HERE! A WOUNDED PILOT!)



?



من أين أتى ؟

ماذا اعرف ؟

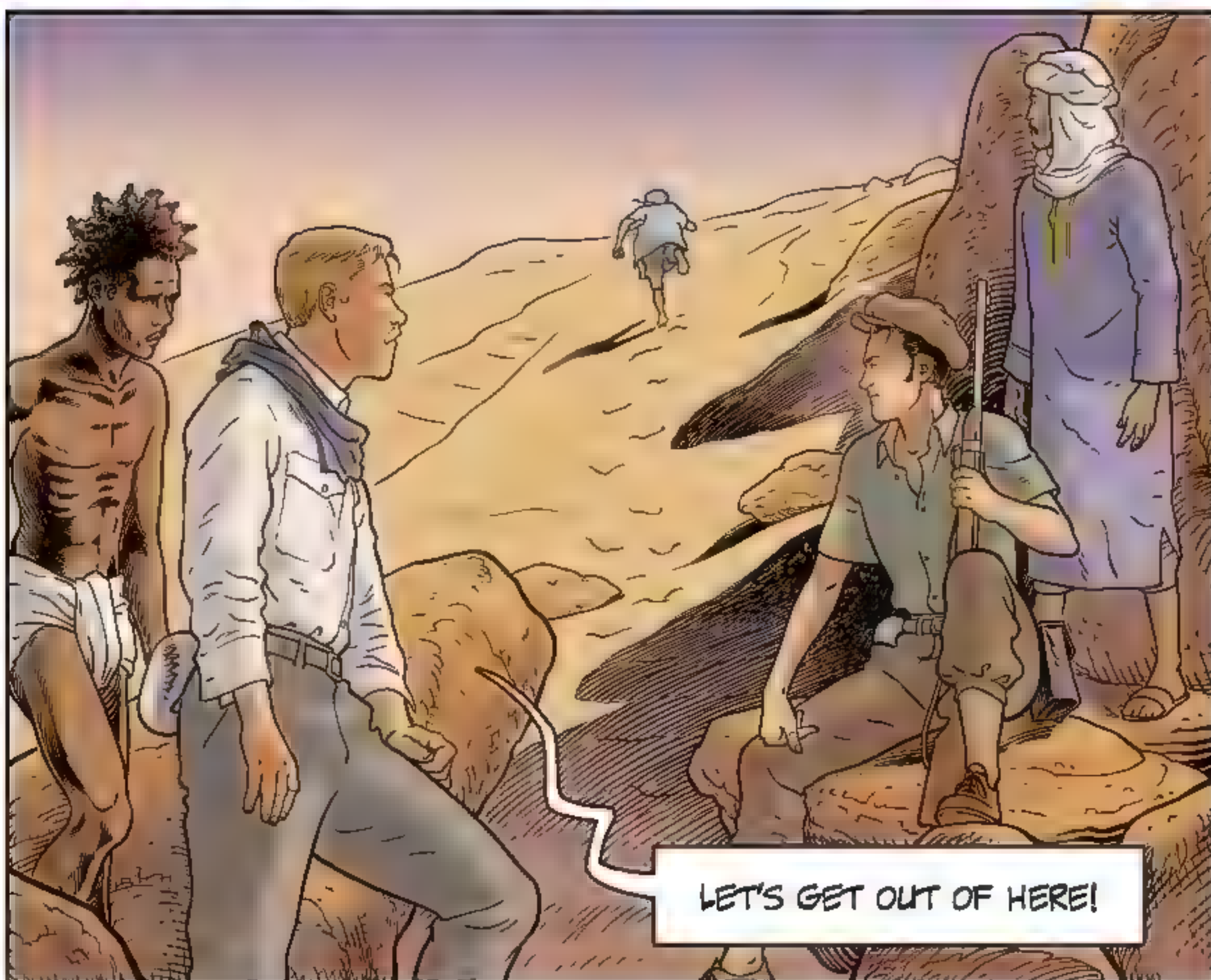
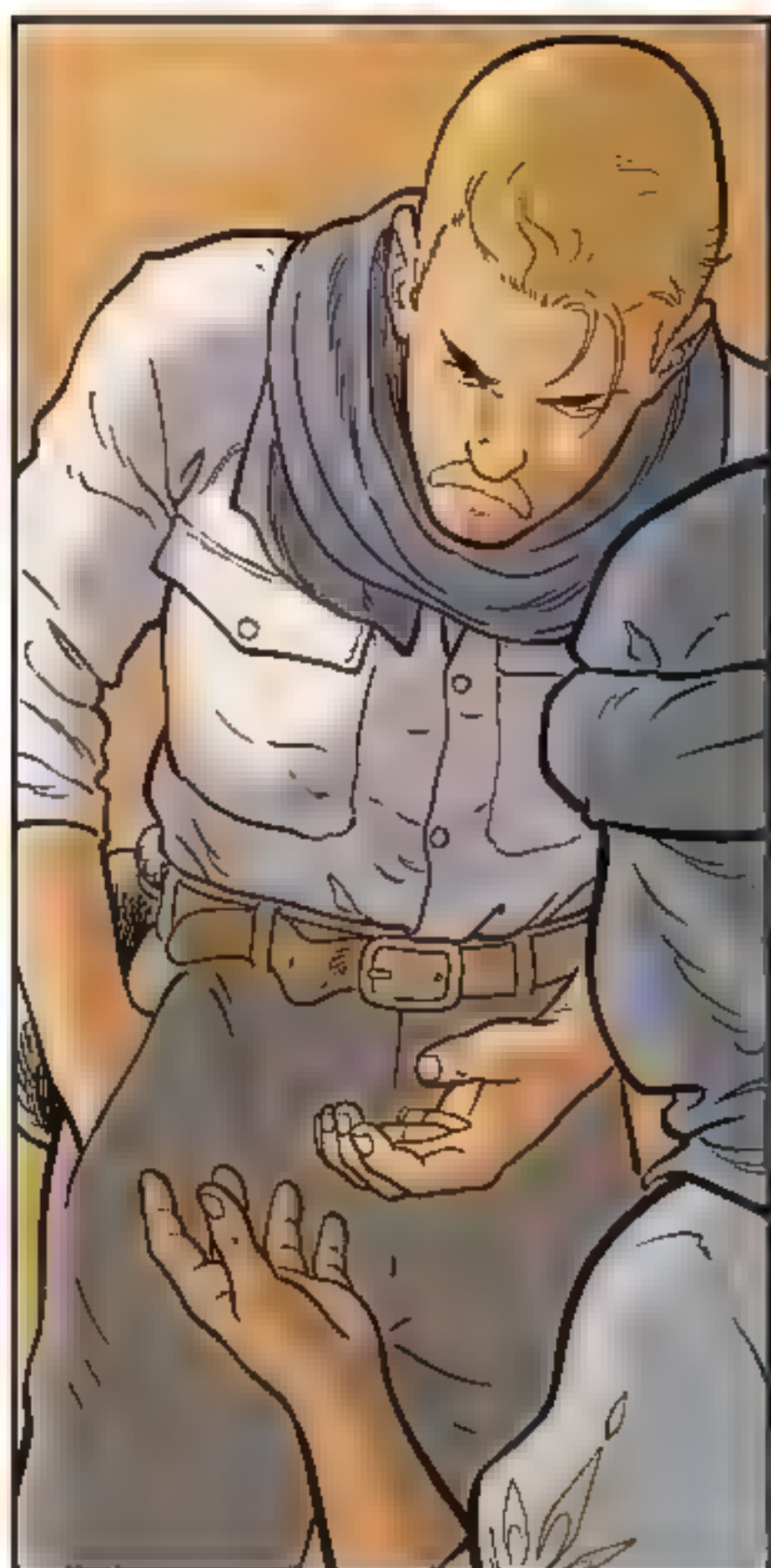
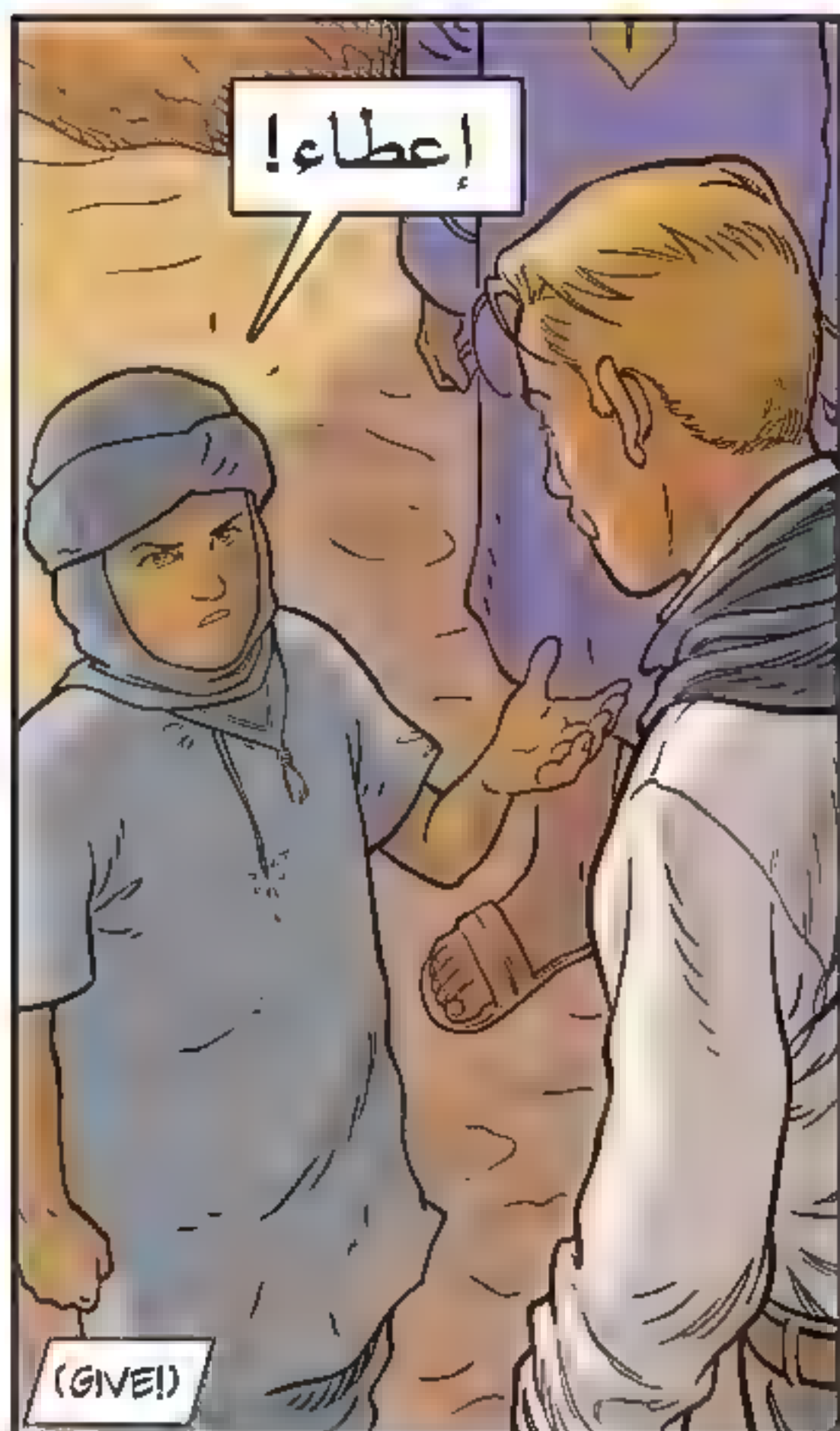
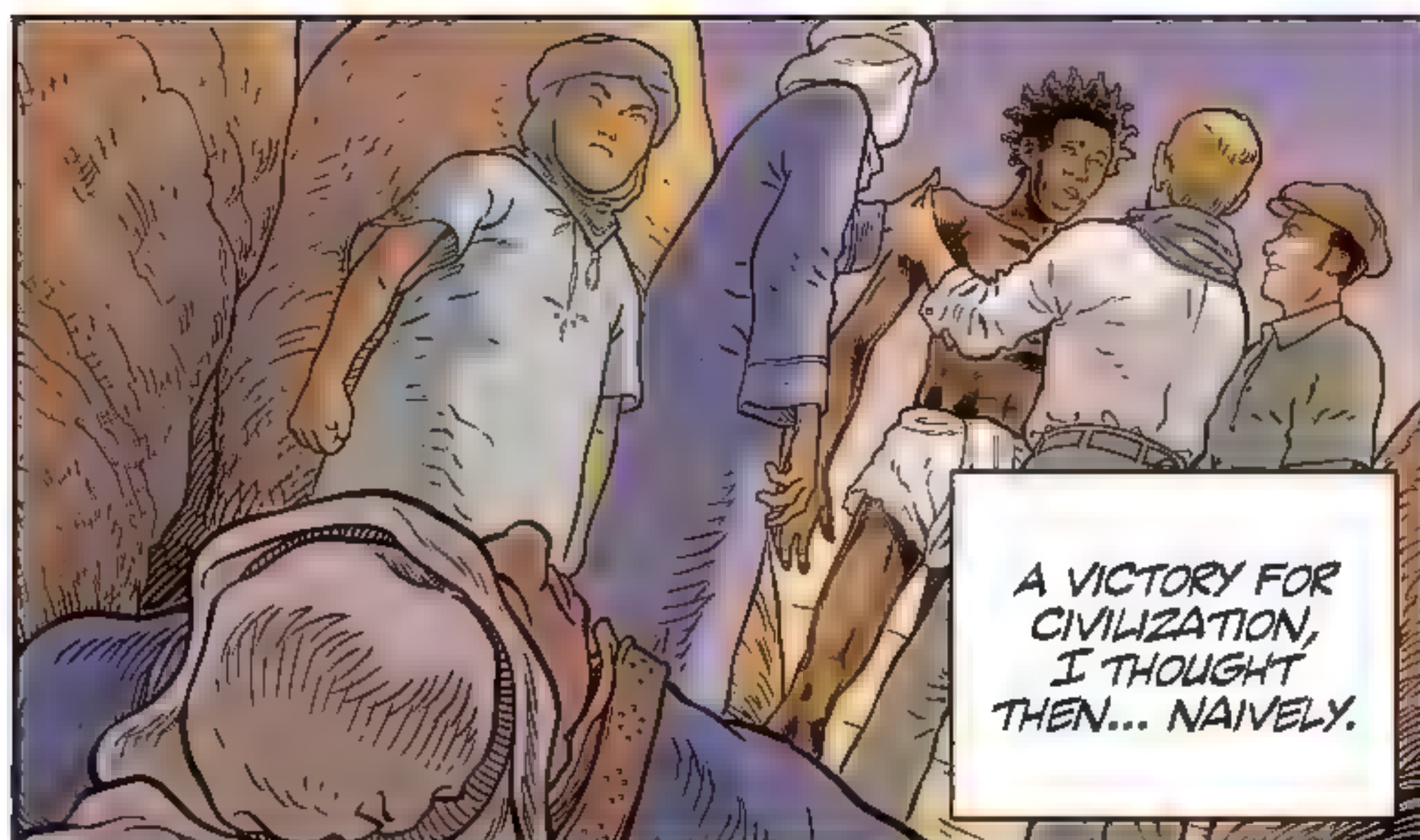
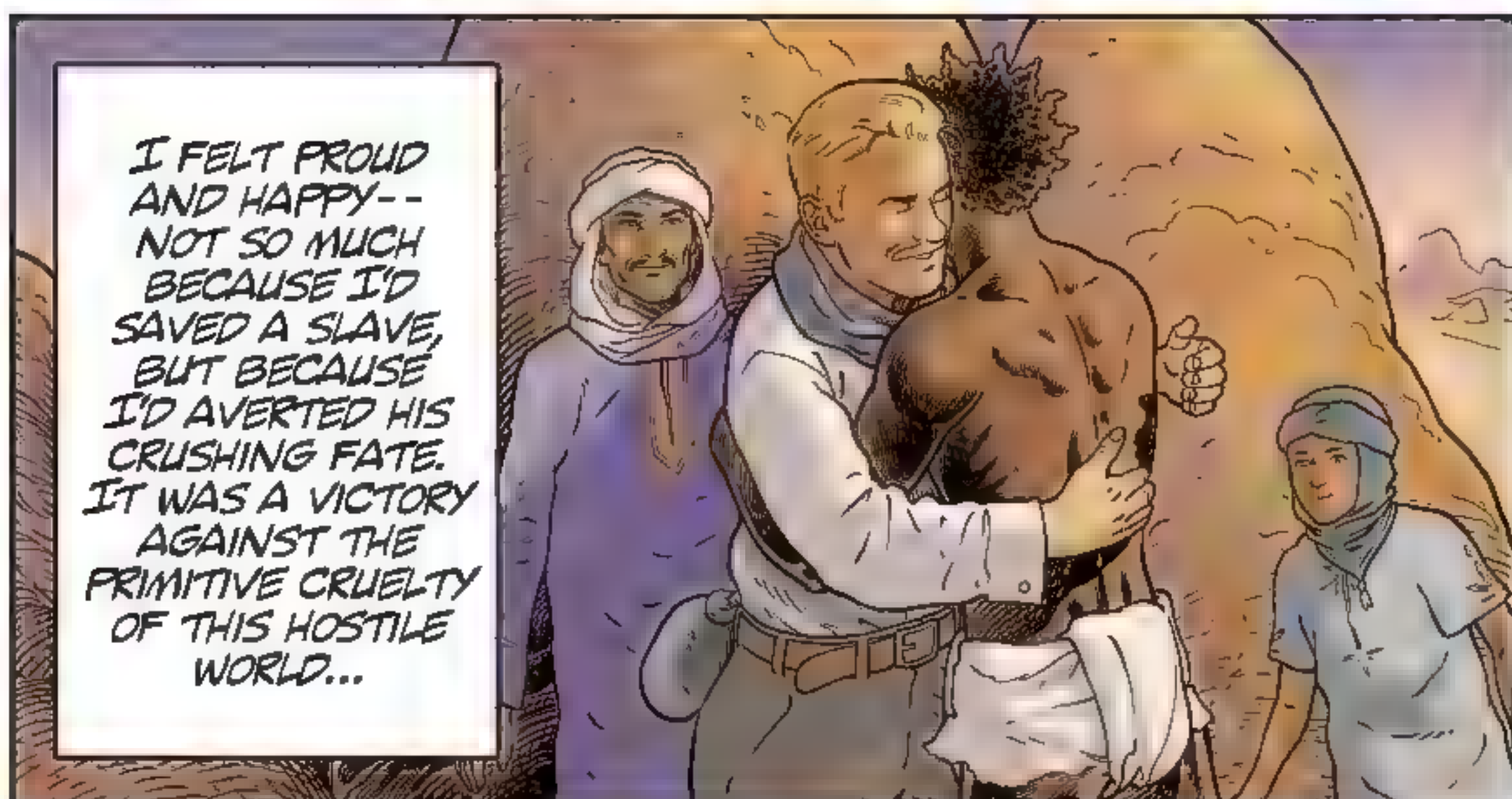
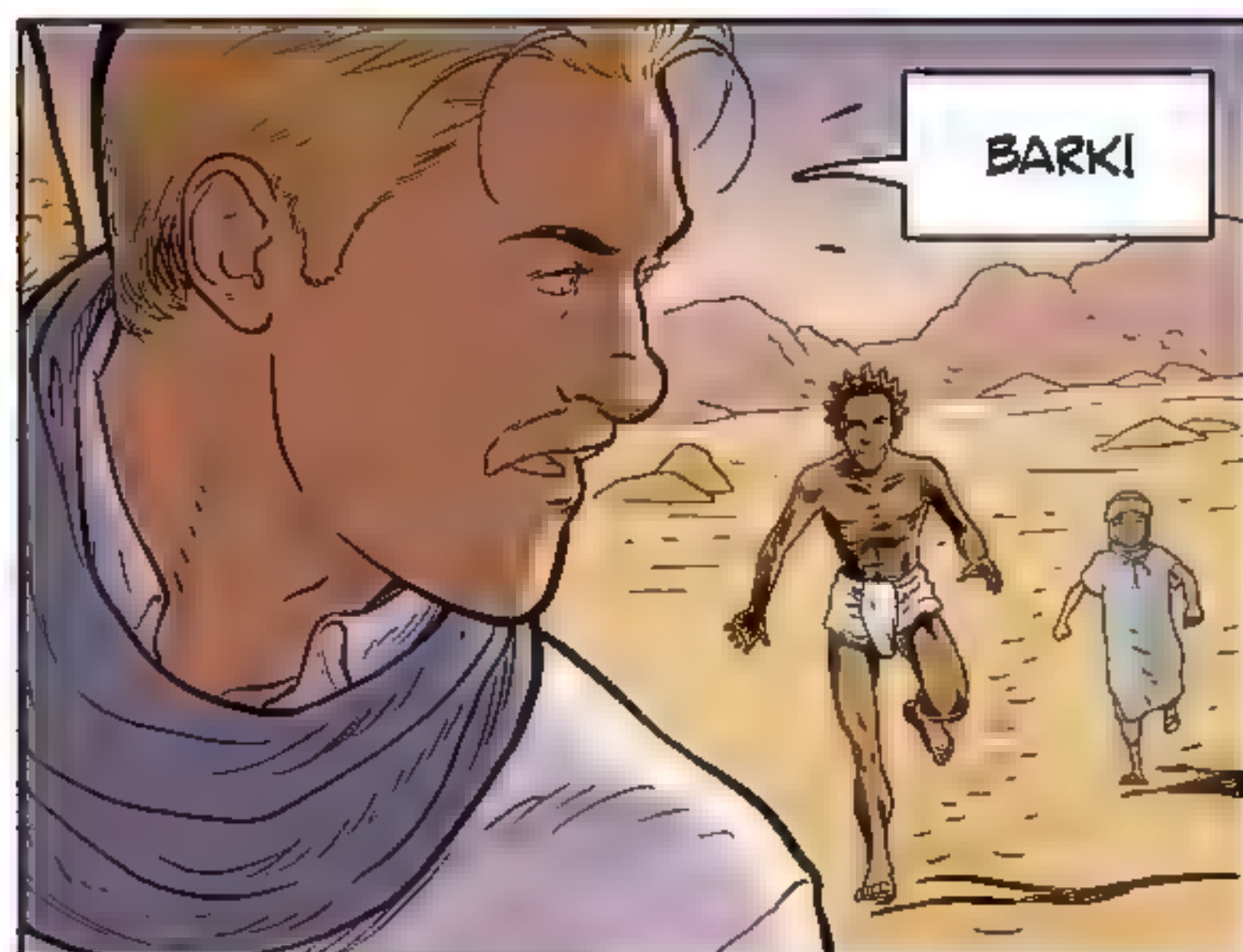
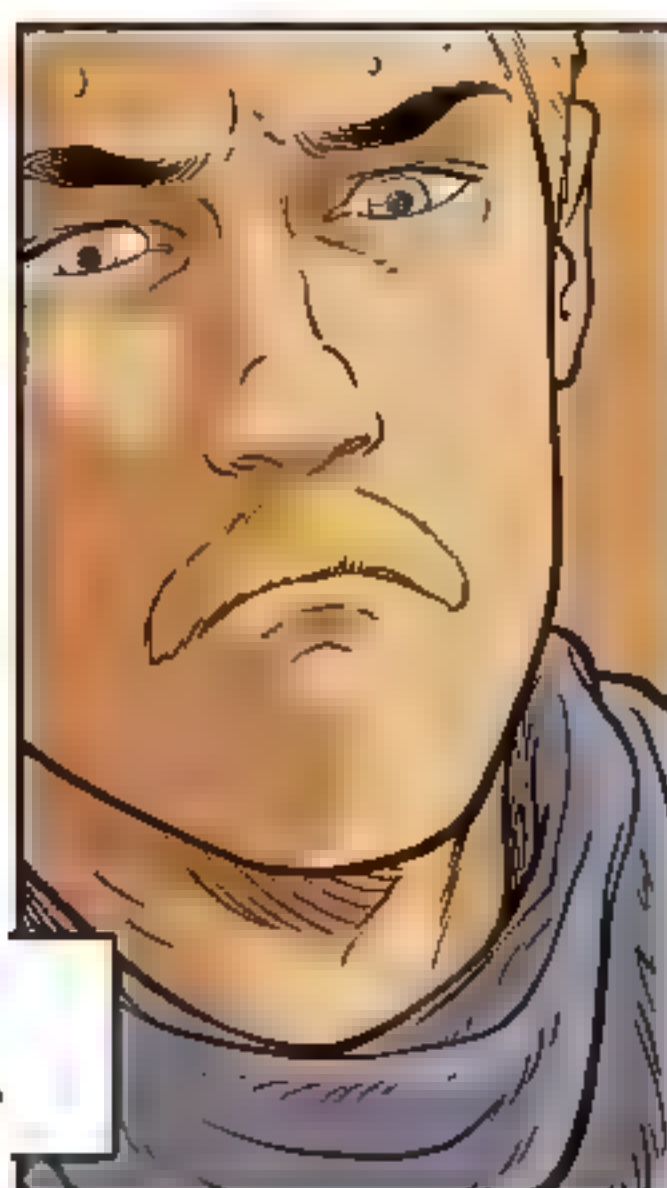
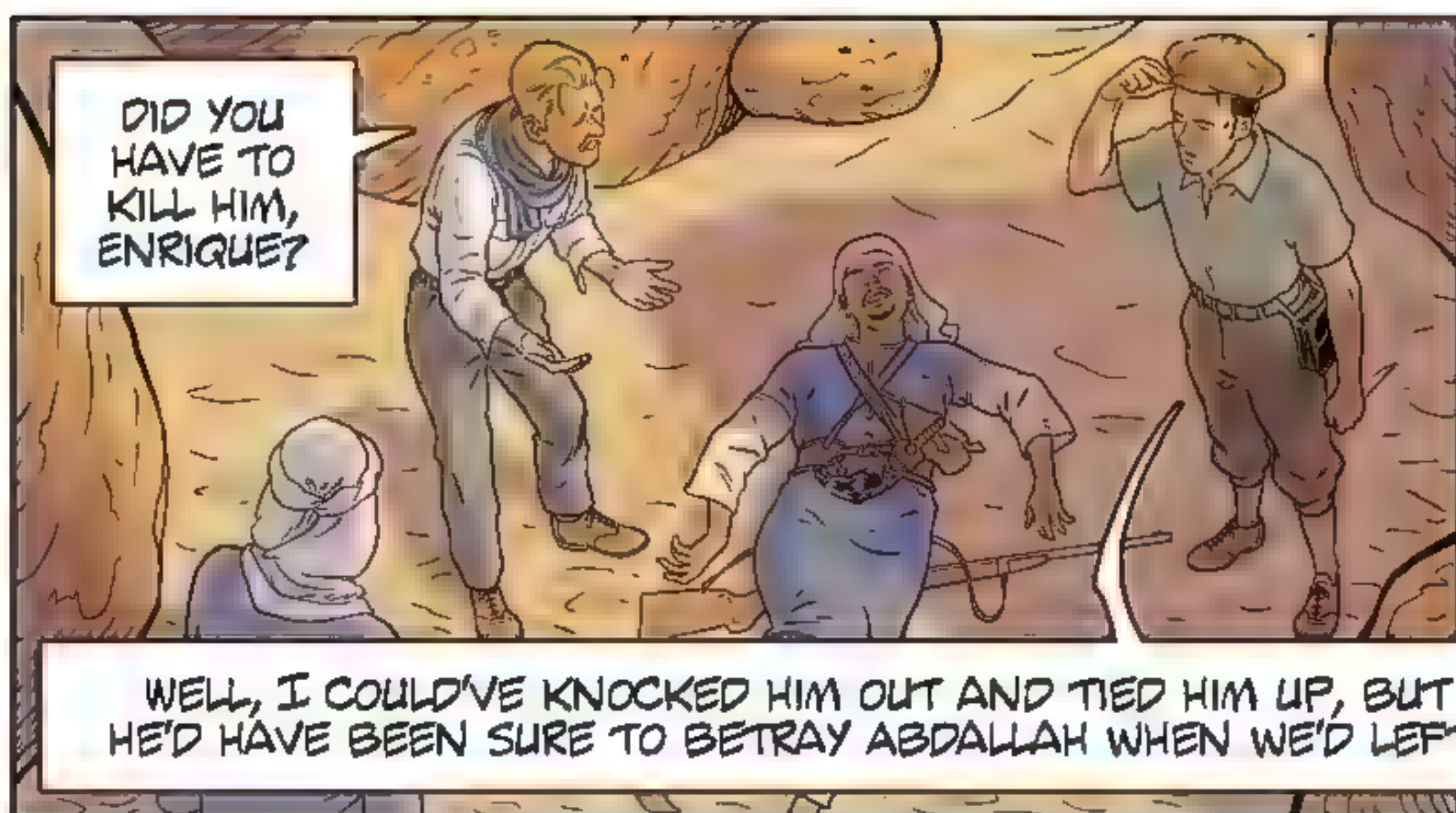
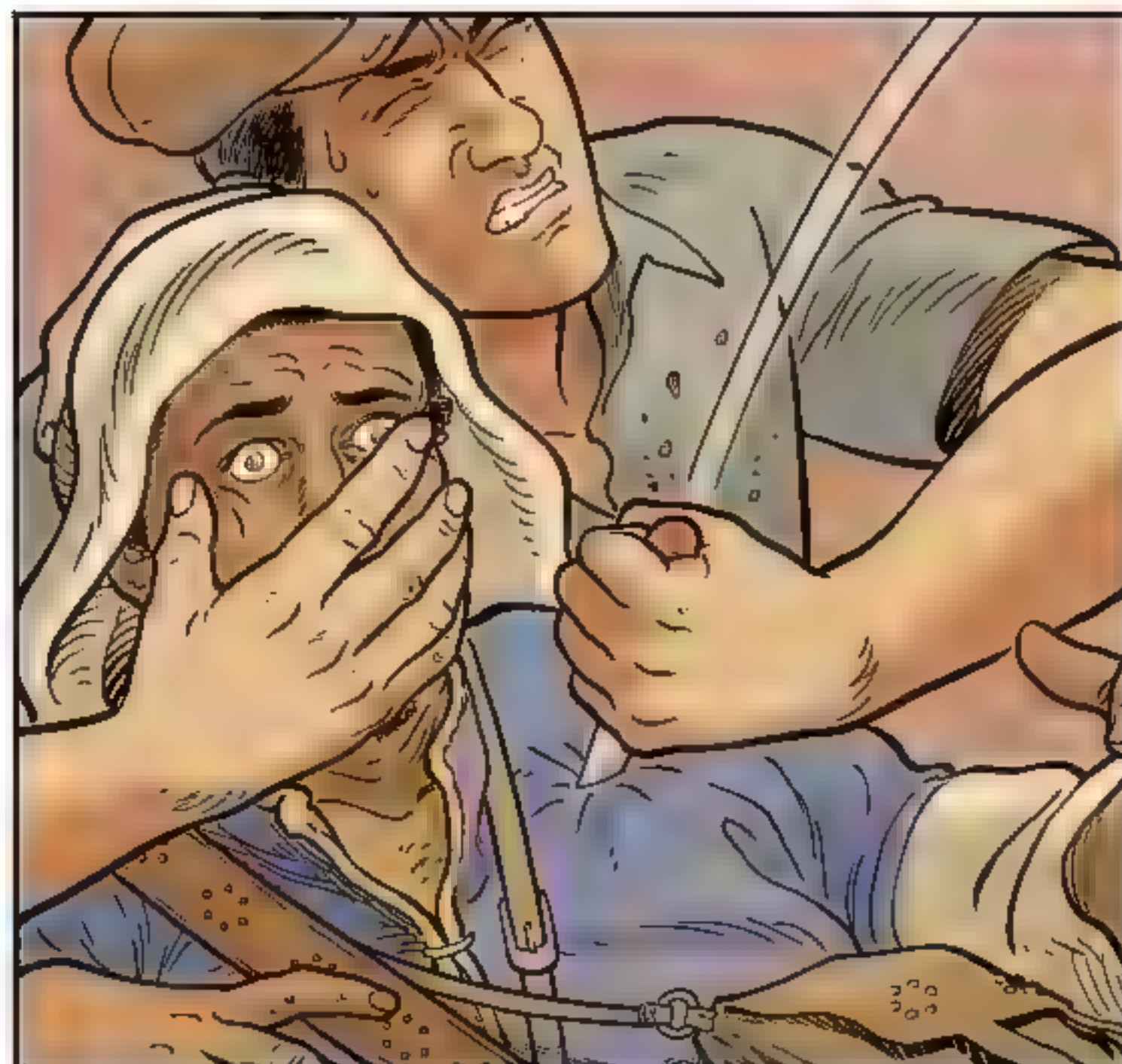
(WHERE DID HE COME FROM?)

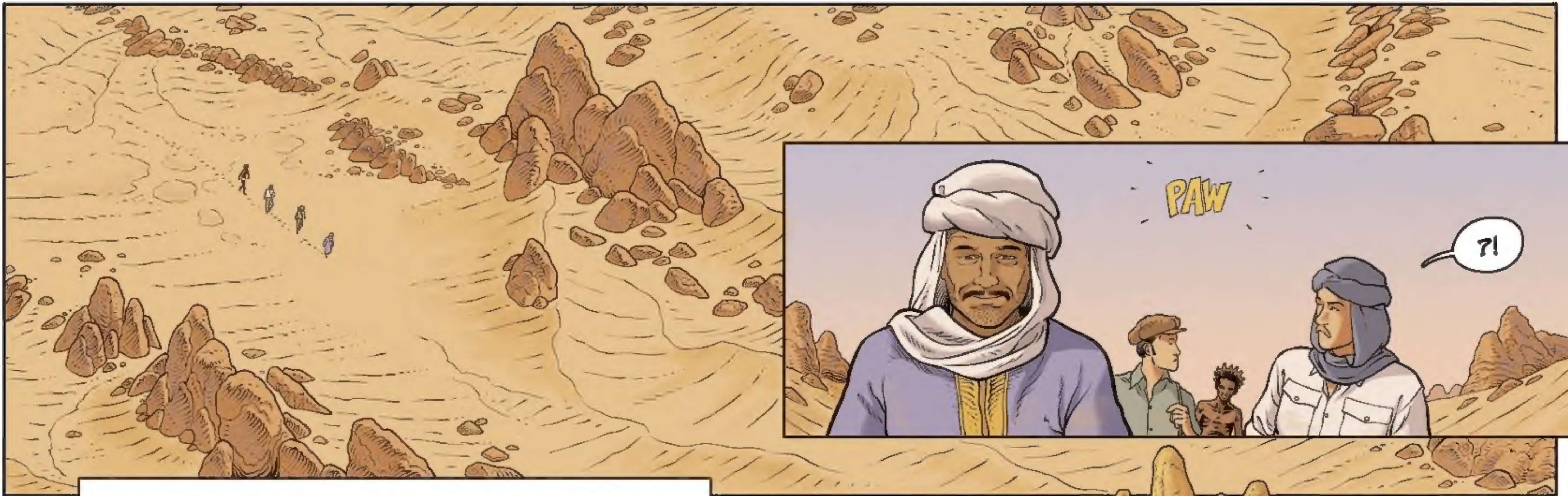
(HOW SHOULD I KNOW?)



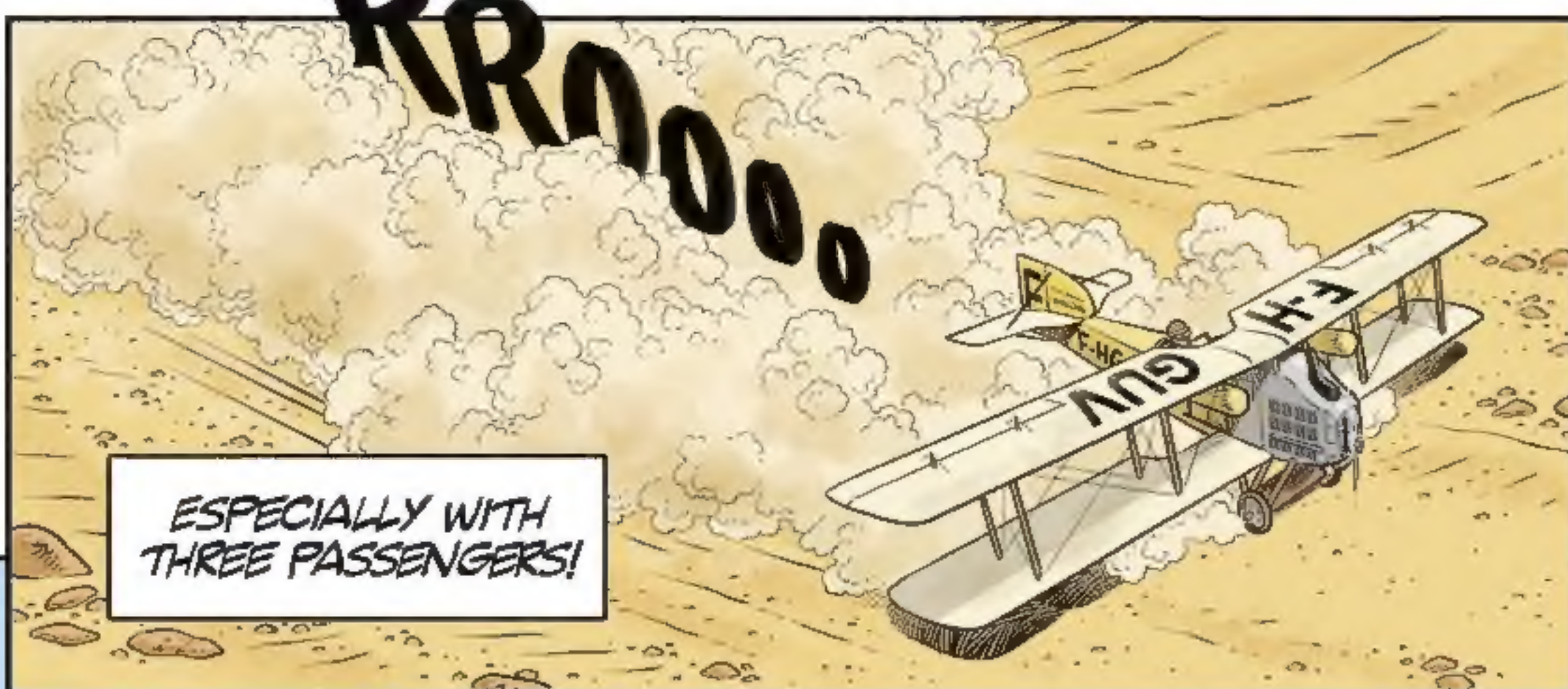
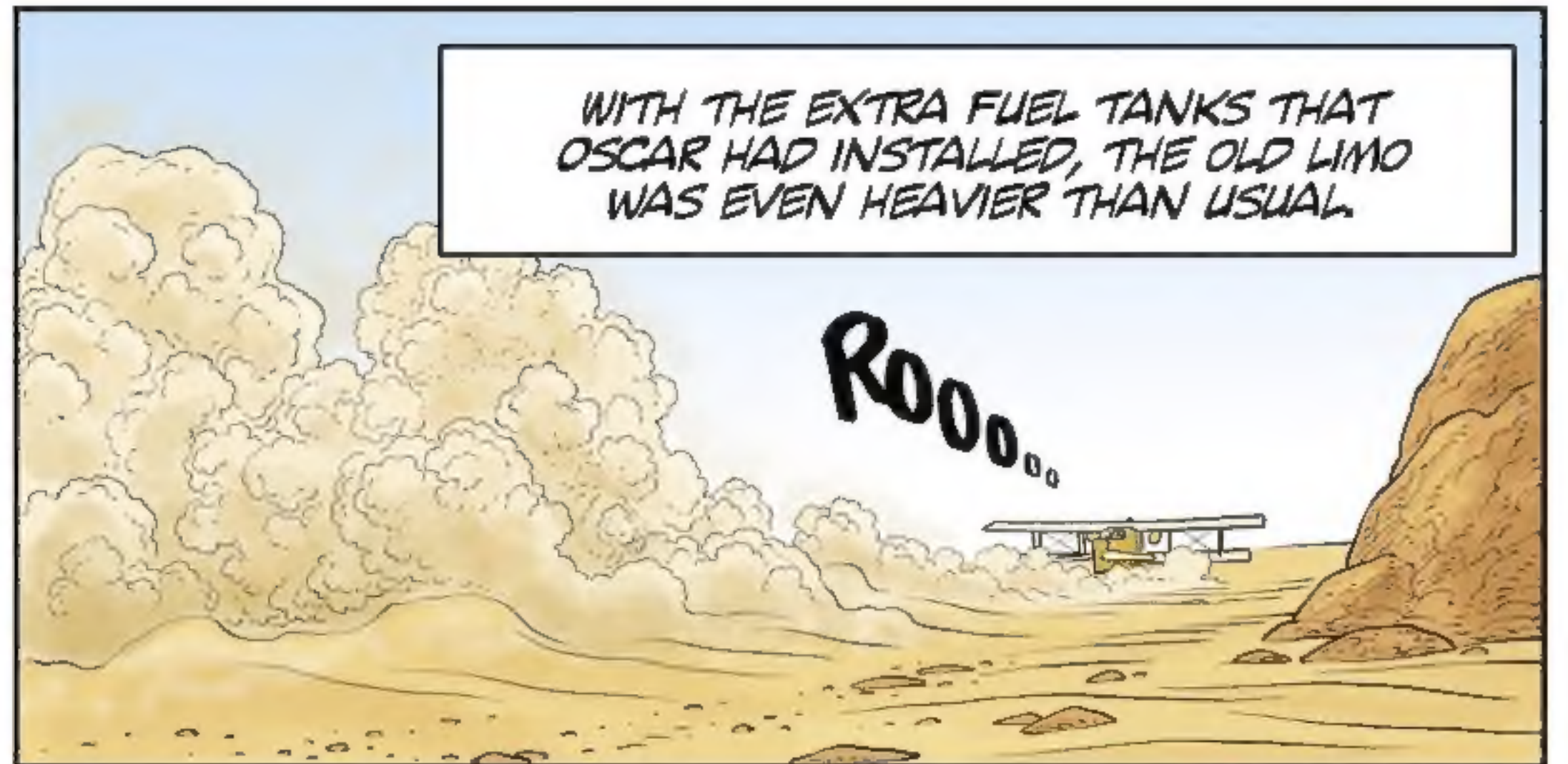
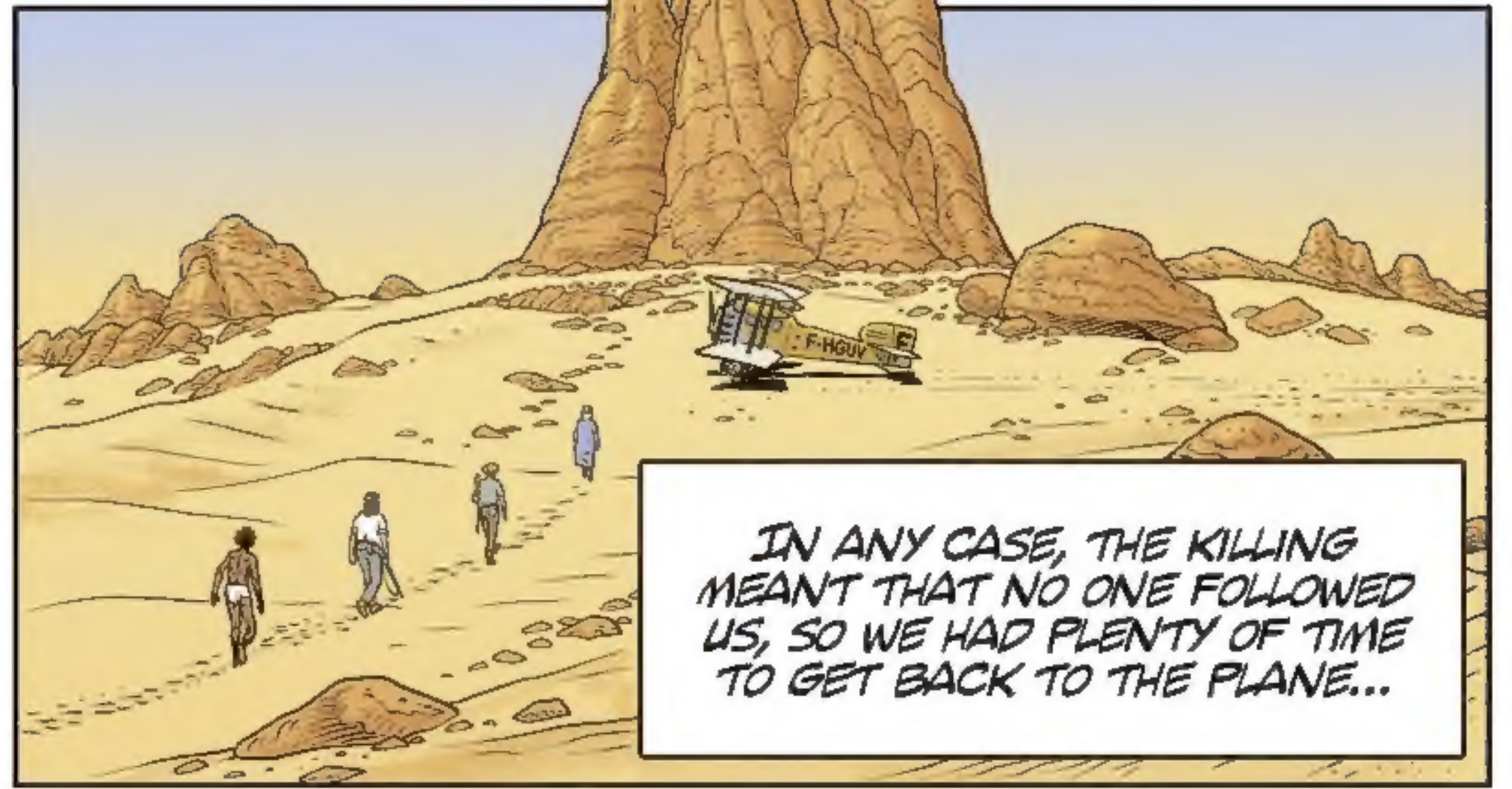
لقد مات ؟

(IS HE DEAD?)

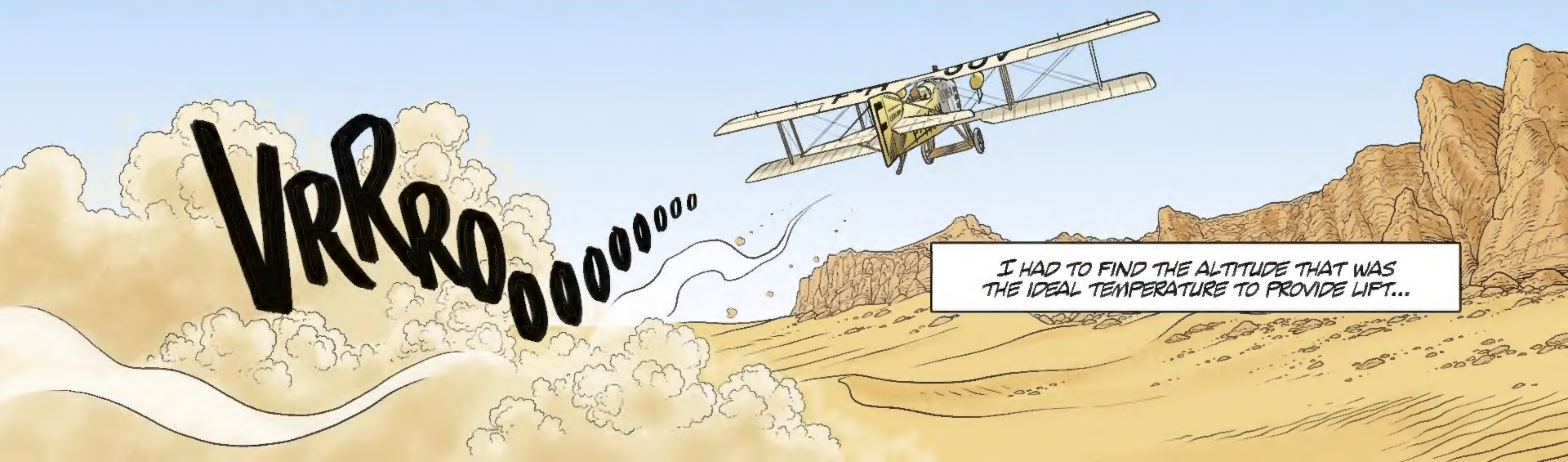
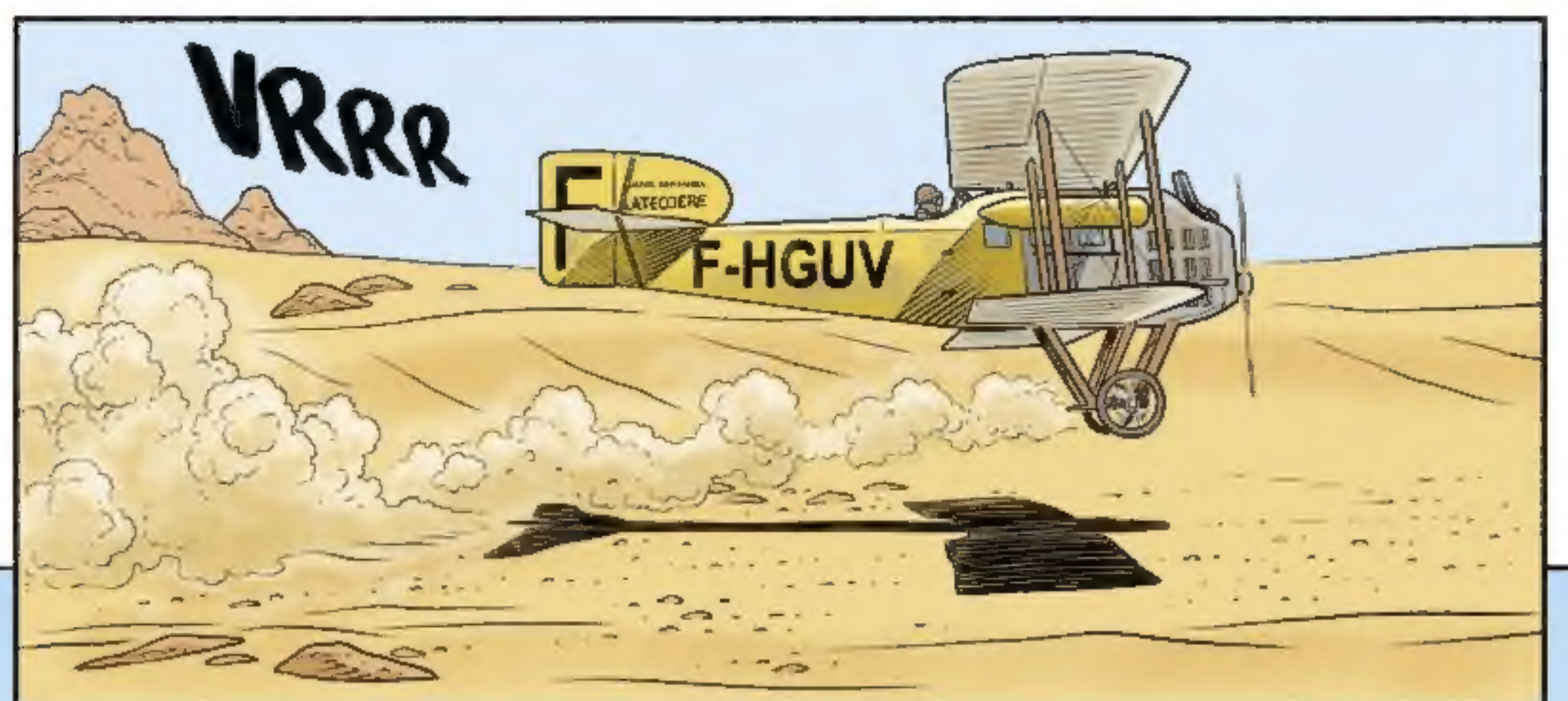




ABDALLAH'S UNCLE HAD PAID FOR HIS CRUELTY.
THE BOY HAD ALL THE MAKINGS OF A CHIEF!



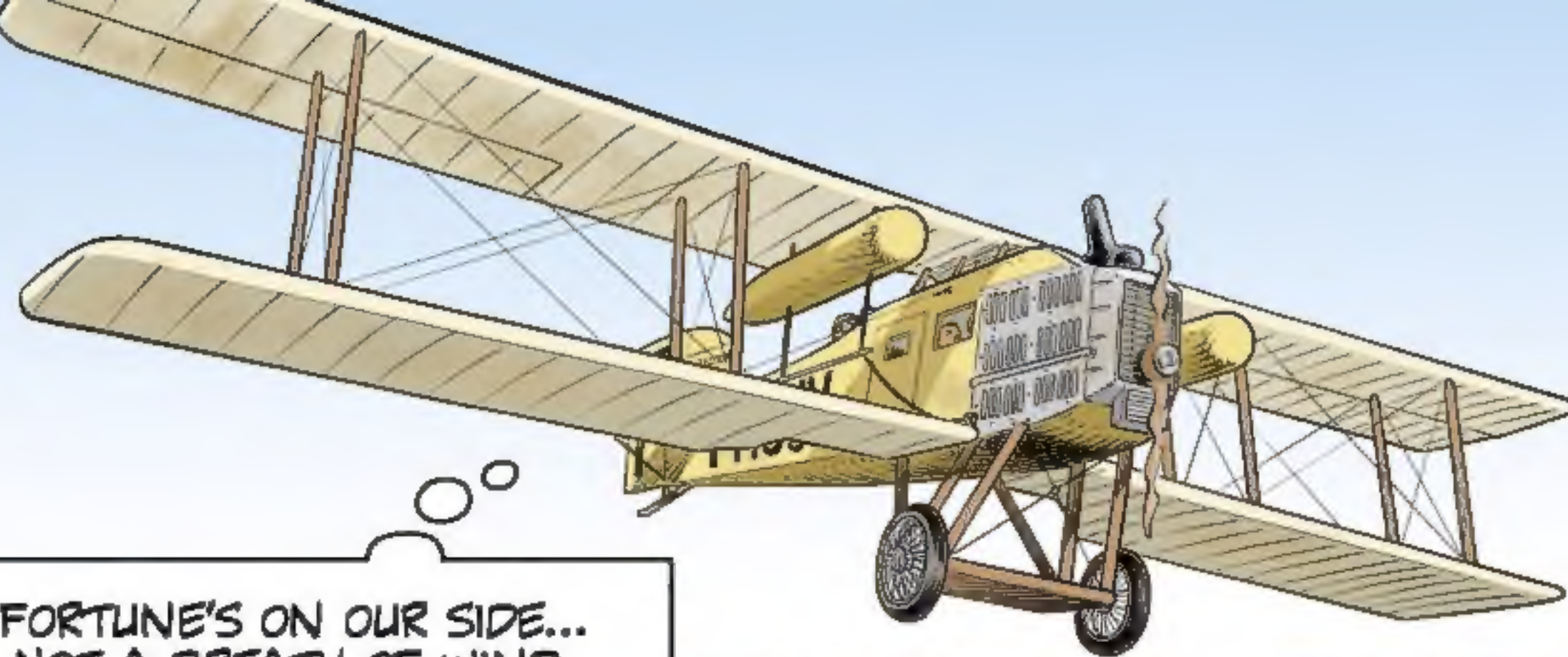
ESPECIALLY WITH
THREE PASSENGERS!



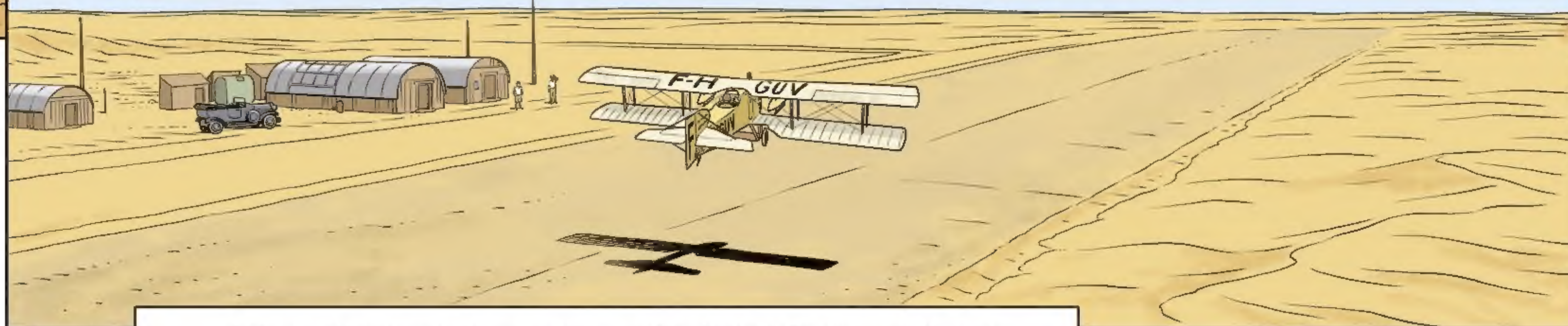
I HAD TO FIND THE ALTITUDE THAT WAS
THE IDEAL TEMPERATURE TO PROVIDE LIFT...

...AND KEEP THE PLANE ON AN INVISIBLE LINE BETWEEN TWO LAYERS OF MOVING AIR. IT WOULD TAKE ALL THE TRICKS OF THE TRADE THAT THE OLD HANDS HAD TAUGHT ME IF WE WERE TO COMPLETE THE LENGTHY FLIGHT THAT LAY AHEAD OF US!

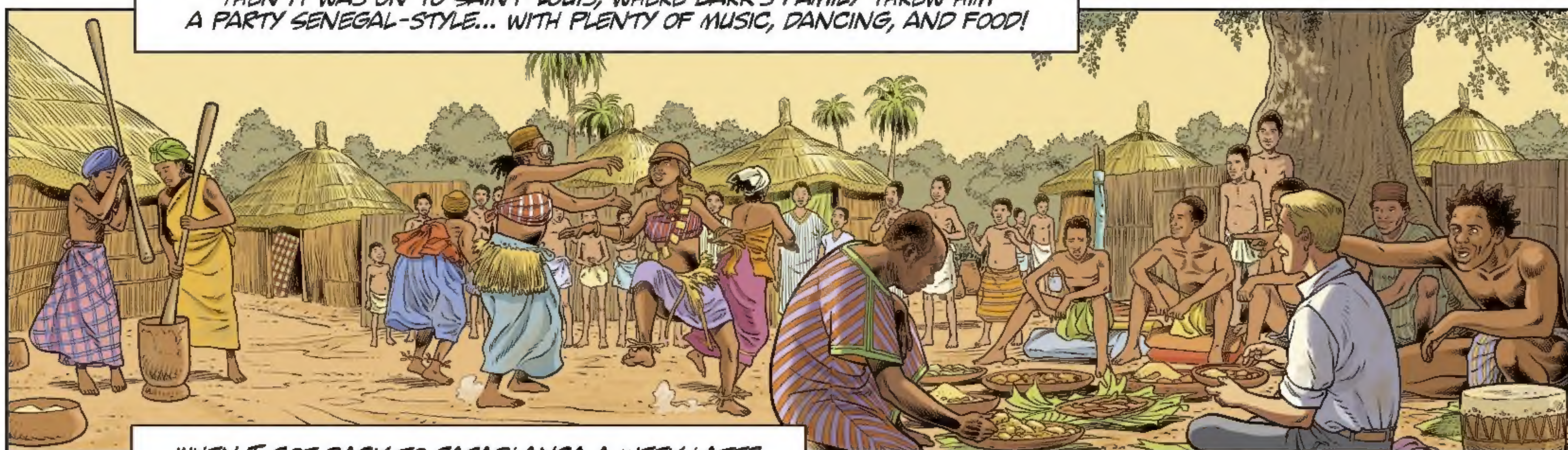
FORTUNE'S ON OUR SIDE... NOT A BREATH OF WIND.



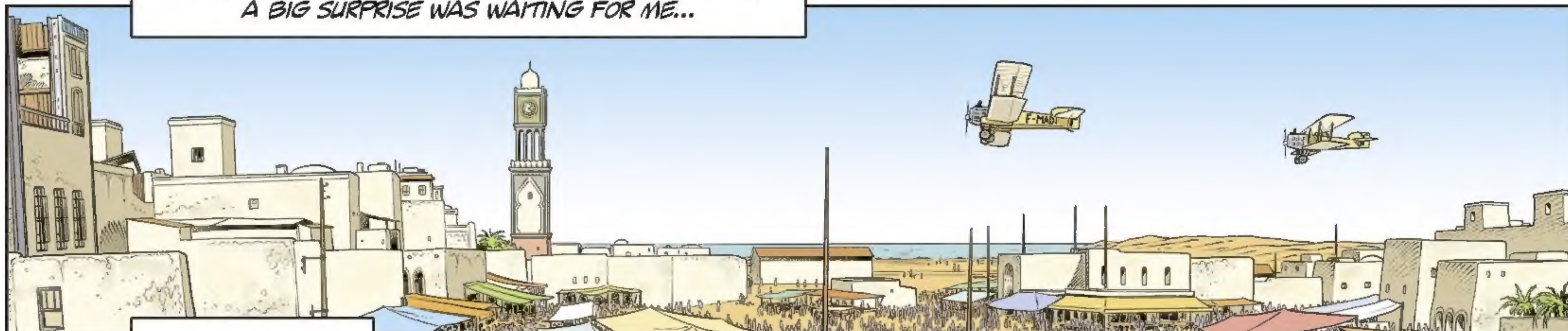
IT WAS OVER 600 MILES TO PORT-ÉTIENNE (1), AND WE'D HAVE TO SKIP THE USUAL STOP AT VILLA CISNEROS, THE LAST SPANISH GARRISON ON THE RIO DE ORO, WHERE ENRIQUE WOULD'VE BEEN ARRESTED. WE COULD MAKE IT WITH THE EXTRA TANKS (2), BUT I'D STILL HAVE TO USE AS LITTLE FUEL AS POSSIBLE.



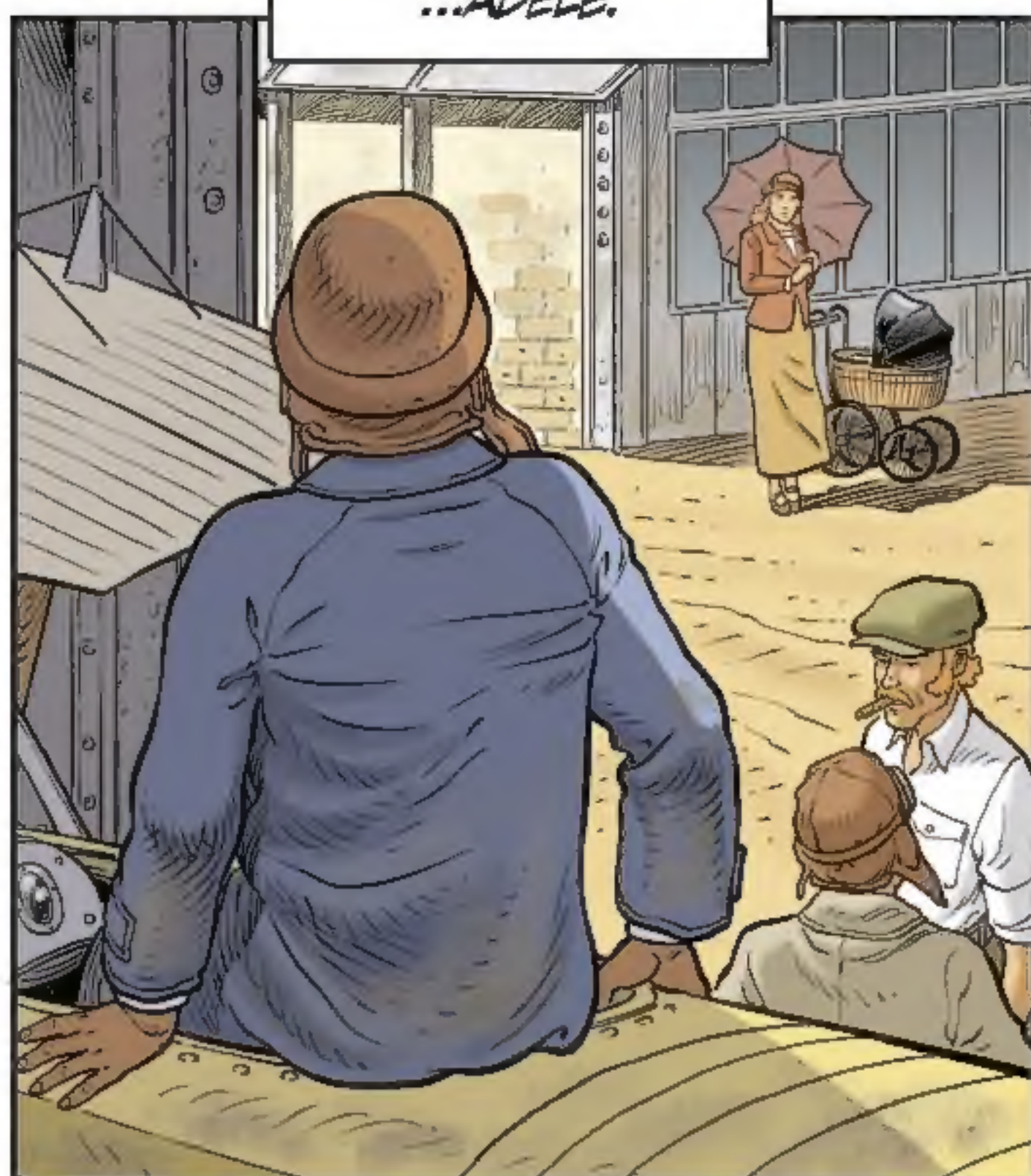
THEN IT WAS ON TO SAINT-LOUIS, WHERE BARK'S FAMILY THREW HIM A PARTY SENEGAL-STYLE... WITH PLENTY OF MUSIC, DANCING, AND FOOD!



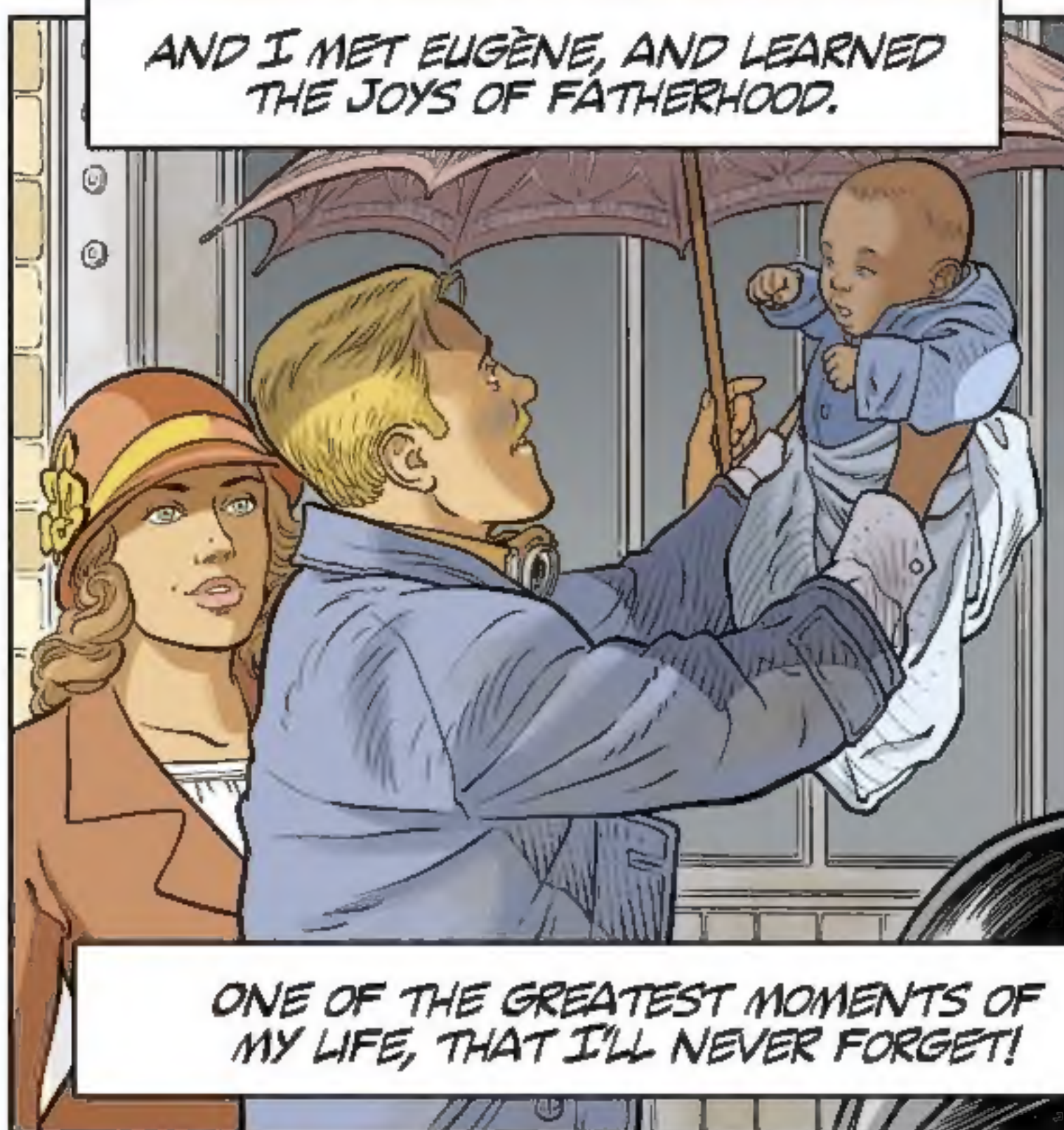
WHEN I GOT BACK TO CASABLANCA A WEEK LATER, A BIG SURPRISE WAS WAITING FOR ME...



...ADÈLE.



AND I MET EUGÈNE, AND LEARNED THE JOYS OF FATHERHOOD.



ONE OF THE GREATEST MOMENTS OF MY LIFE, THAT I'LL NEVER FORGET!



(1) MODERN-DAY NOUADHIBOU IN MAURITANIA.

(2) WITHOUT THEM, A BREGUET XIV HAD A RANGE OF ONLY 400 MILES.



January 9, 1926.
Adèle and I get
married at the Église
du Sacré-Cœur in
Casablanca.

- 1926 -

February 1926. Pierre, a pilot on the
Casablanca-Dakar route, grows a "metal tree"
on the runway during a sandstorm. I forget
his surname. He was killed two months later.

With the cavalry officer who
saved me from marauding
Reguibats—and from almost
certain imprisonment and
torture—after my engine blew
up 20 miles from Cape Juby.



END

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to my old friend Marc Dolidier, aviation buff and recreational pilot,
for his technical advice and attentive reading.

JCK

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